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Scripted Behavior:

Michelangelo's Evolving Calligraphy and Artistic Self-Representation

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Scripted Behavior:

Michelangelo's Evolving Calligraphy and Artistic Self-Representation

by

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my loving parents who gave me the world when they gave me the gift of education. Thank you for your unceasing love and support.

Abstract

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In the age of digitization, archivists, scholars, and art historians have questioned the role of documents once they have been transcribed, published, and stored away in digital repositories. If the information is recorded and saved, how else can a manuscript speak to the art historian? Archival materials such as personal correspondence and manuscripts are traditionally divorced from an individual's larger corpus of artistic output. The texts themselves are mined solely for information that can inform a work of art, and are typically not regarded for their own formal qualities. This thesis challenges such a practice, asserting that personal letters, particularly those of Michelangelo Buonarroti and his contemporaries, should be approached as artistic artifacts whose formal qualities alone offer a wealth of information regarding the artist and his social context. Focusing on the social implications of Michelangelo's shift from using the *mercantesca* script to the *cancelleresca* script used

by humanists and papal dignitaries, this paper proposes that developments in Michelangelo's writing style mirror other efforts the artist made to construct a distinct identity. Ultimately, this thesis argues that by the dawn of the Cinquecento, script was an integral aspect of personal identity creation and professional reception for a Renaissance artist.

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Introduction

In responding to the mark, we confront the artist. Through the record of his creating gestures we in fact recreate the process of creation; following his energies, directions, decisions, we participate in his projection of himself in the work.

—David Rosand

In the opening remarks of his 1989 lecture series entitled, *The Meaning of the Mark: Leonardo and Titian*, David Rosand called for art historians and connoisseurs to turn to the fundamental element of every artist's production for answers: the line, and by extension, on the act of of its production—the gesture of drawing. Rosand observes that an abstract idea is embedded in each mark drawn on a page. He notes that in the process of viewing a line, we follow the record of a path of motion but we also, even primarily, "respond to the *quality* of the line—to the way in which it was drawn, the nature of the marker's tracing, its material, the weight and the velocity of the hand behind it, its physiognomy and its larger affective resonance."[1] In responding to the mark, he explains, we confront the artist, and "through the record of his creating gestures we in fact recreate the process of creation; following his energies, directions, decisions, we participate in his *projection of himself in the work*."[2]

In the statements above, Rosand describes a specific set of formalist exercises undertaken by the art historian or connoisseur. The processes that he describes—that is,

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[1] Rosand, David. *The Meaning of the Mark: Leonardo and Titian* (Lawrence, Kansas: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 1988), 11.

[2]Ibid. 9. My emphasis added.

following the movement of line, examining its material, the weight and velocity of the hand behind it, and determining its exact physiognomy or overall affective resonance—are all strikingly similar to the processes used by paleographers and archivists responding to marks made through the act of writing. In fact, Rosand's description of studying the mark and allowing it to lead the eye conforms exactly to the paleographic process of studying a script's ductus, or rather, the shape, number, and order of strokes used to compose a letter. For paleographers, a scribe's ductus is the equivalent of a painter's brushstroke. It is an idiosyncratic form of mark making that reveals exactly what the writer was doing as they were forming the letters and at what speed they were making marks on the page. How different, then, are drawn marks and written marks? As art historians, if we are able to confront artists by responding to their marks on the page and if we are able to decode their energies, directions, decisions, and influences simply by examining the lines that they draw as Rosand suggests, then why do we fail to pay attention to the words that an artist writes and their individual scripts? How much different, after all, are the acts of writing and drawing from each other? As Cennino Cennini points out, both drawing and writing are activities that share a common instrument, the quill.[3] Following Rosand's logic, if an artist is supposedly projecting himself through the marks that he makes, his script represents a whole system of abstract ideas laid out on a page. In other words, an artist's picture may be worth a thousand words, but a thousand words have the power to construct a picture of the artist himself.

[3] Cennini, Cennino and Lara Broecke, *Cennino Cennini's Il libro dell'arte: A New English Language Translation and Commentary with Italian Transcription* (London: Archetype Publ., 2015), 34.

Within the realm of art history, archival materials such as personal correspondence or *ricordi* are traditionally divorced from an individual's larger corpus of artistic output. Unlike paleographers and archivists who engage in extensive analysis of a document's formal or material qualities, art historians typically mine texts exclusively for facts that might inform a work of art or artist. Documents are rarely, if ever, regarded as art objects themselves, especially if they are composed solely of text and do not include marginal images. I aim to challenge this prevailing practice, asserting that personal letters, particularly those of Michelangelo Buonarroti and his contemporaries, should be approached as artistic artifacts whose formal qualities alone offer a wealth of information regarding an artist and their social context. More specifically, I aim to confront Michelangelo and his contemporaries through their written legacy, focusing on the messages and narratives that are communicated through their personal scripts. Inspired by Rosand's statements, I am "responding to the mark."

As several examples from Western history demonstrate, a person's manner of writing was thought to have been directly related to their character, class, education, and even ambition. Traditionally the history of graphology—the study of handwriting and its correlation to personal character—is traced back to the Seicento in Italy. In 1622, Camillo Baldi (1550-1637), a Bolognese philosopher and physician, published the first essay on the subject, *Trattato come da una lettera missiva si conoscano la natura e qualità dello scrittore.*[4] Heavily indebted to Aristotelian philosophy and the classical text *De elocutione*

[4] Camillo Baldi, *Trattato come da una lettera missiva si conoscano la natura e qualitá dello scrittore* (Carpi: 1622). The term "graphology" was not used until the 18th and 19th centuries, however, Baldi's text addresses the same principles of the modern discipline.

(On Style), Baldi's treatise asserts that the spirit of a person is bound up in their writing style.[5] In chapters six through eight of his essay, Baldi notes that an individual's intellect, disposition, and humors are made evident by the formation of words, phrases, orthography, punctuation, and individual voice. Chapter six is particularly relevant to a discussion of premodern scripts and their reception, for Baldi claims that the formal characteristics of letters, as well as the use of certain scripts such as the *corsiva* or *cancelleresca*, reveal the age, ambition, and even the temperament of the the writer.[6] Regardless of whether his system of analysis was precise or not, the author connected prudence and intelligence to the level of neatness and legibility of an author's writing. To Baldi, writing was a conduit for admiration.

The concept that writing reveals aspects of an individual's character is in fact one deeply rooted in antiquity, reaching back to Classical Greece and Ancient Rome. For ancient writers such as Cicero and Suetonius, for example, the term *stilus,* or quill, was the same term used when describing individual's overall manner or mode of expression, as well as their behavior, intellect, and their expected conduct. In the classical era, *stilus* was a value-charged and even elitist concept that signified inclusion into a segment of the educated elite.[7] Intent on crafting a way of life deeply rooted in antiquity, in the early Renaissance, Italian humanists, scholars, and educators resurrected this classical notion

[5] In fact, Baldi references multiple ancient writers in the first six pages of his essay, quoting or mentioning Menander, Aristotle, Socrates, and Demetrius.

[6] Ibid., 18-20.

[7] Willibald Suaerlander, "From Stilus to Style: Reflections on the Fate of a Notion," *Art History* 6, No. 3 (September 1983): 254. This will be discussed at length in Chapter One.

well before Baldi wrote his treatise in 1622. By the beginning of the Quattrocento, script was indeed an integral facet of the humanist lifestyle, and was quite literally the mark of an individual's classical education and values. An artist's script, therefore, contributed to how they were perceived by the public and was a visible way in which they could assert their class and personal tastes during the Renaissance.

Over the course of his long career, Michelangelo shifted from using a script reserved for the merchant class, the *mercantesca*, to using the script used only by humanists and the Italian nobility, the *cancelleresca*. This thesis argues that Michelangelo's change in writing style was a deliberate act that mirrored other efforts the artist took to construct a distinct identity as a noble member of the educated elite. Moreover, I propose that Michelangelo was not the only major artist adjusting his personal script, demonstrating that Leonardo and Raphael also adapted their manner of writing over time to communicate dimensions of their personal artistic style. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that for Michelangelo and his contemporaries script was an important aspect of personal identity creation and professional reception during the Cinquecento.

A Chapter by Chapter Overview

In terms of methodology, this thesis approaches the subject of Michelangelo's script through many lenses. The first chapter approaches the topic through the lens of social history, examining the historical context for Michelangelo's scripts and providing a general overview of the scripts commonly used during the Quattrocento and Cinquecento. Looking specifically at historic attitudes toward writing, this chapter proposes that script was a

major topic in classical and premodern discussions of virtue. Furthermore, script was a visual byproduct of social divisions in Italy and was an important tool for asserting class during the Renaissance.

Chapter Two looks specifically at Michelangelo's calligraphy and the specific changes that he made to his writing style over time. Having compared a broad cross-section of documents written by Michelangelo from the beginning of his career up until his death in 1564, I propose that there are two primary phases in the development of Michelangelo's handwriting: the early, experimental period from 1496 to 1517, and the period of extreme consistency from 1517 to 1564.[8] Using a combination of paleographic and comparative analysis, I track the exact changes that Michelangelo made to his letter forms during these two periods. From the evidence, it appears that Michelangelo was consciously developing his script until he reached a normative style of writing around 1517, which he continued to use almost completely unaltered for the next four decades. I argue that this was one of many actions that Michelangelo took to cultivate and perpetuate his self-image as a nobleman artist rather than simply a craftsman. I also assert that his consistent, flawless script would have likely contributed to the myth that the artist was both divine and noble, as Vasari and Condivi claim in their biographies of Michelangelo.

[8] This chapter focuses primarily on Table 1, an original chart comparing ten different documents penned by Michelangelo over the course of his career against standardized scripts published in early writing manuals. While it is impossible to include all 500 extant letters in this comparison, the documents in this table are meant to be representative of how Michelangelo wrote each decade. This figure aims to represent each major epoch of Michelangelo's career, condensing a lifetime of the artist's script into a single, comprehensive image.

Chapter Three explores the scripts that other artists were using during the late Quattrocento through the early Cinquecento. Using the same methodologies utilized in Chapter Two, this chapter demonstrates that it was uncommon for the everyday artist or craftsman to be using the *cancelleresca* throughout the Quattrocento. By the the beginning of the Cinquecento, however, the amount of artists writing in humanist scripts increased exponentially. This was especially the case for high-profile artists working in the limelight such as Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael, who were also experimenting with *cancelleresca* forms. The visual and historical evidence suggests that by the second half of the Cinquecento, script became a primary avenue through which artists were able to communicate aspects of their personal styles, interests, and reputation to their peers and prospective patrons. This chapter concludes that despite the fact that other artists were changing their script over time, Michelangelo was unique in his astonishing consistency after 1517. Like the mediums of sculpture and painting, script was yet another art form that Michelangelo sought to master.

Chapter One: The Historical Context for Michelangelo's Scripts

In his 2012 handbook on the fundamentals of modern typography, professor and designer Cyrus Highsmith explains that there are three ways in which a viewer interacts with text: at the most superficial level, the viewer simply scans the illustrations, looking only at the pictorial surface material for information. The second level of interaction is reading the text by itself without referencing any corresponding images. The final form of interaction is when the viewer studies images alongside the text—an exercise that requires the viewer to engage with both a physical object as well as material, ideas, or context beyond the physical page. Regardless of what level of interaction a reader has with a text, Highsmith asserts that there are many things going on inside of a single paragraph or on the surface of a single page that the reader may not immediately register. In other words, below the surface there is a narrative, a complex system of associations involving images, letter forms themselves, and the messages that each communicates. Highsmith encourages the reader to imagine that letters and words are like works of art, and as such, viewers should observe text just as one would formally examine a drawing or painting. "A word is like a drawing," Highsmith writes, "your eyes move around to take it all in, but your mind perceives it as a whole thing."[9]

Highsmith's handbook is directed primarily at artists and designers interested in the basics of digital and print typography, however, his theory that a word is like a drawing is one that can easily be extended to other disciplines such as paleography and art history.

[9] Cyrus Highsmith, *INSIDE PARAGRAPHS: Typographic Fundamentals* (Boston, MA: The Font Bureau, 2012), 35.

When examining the personal letters of Michelangelo Buonarroti, for example, scholars can engage in any of the aforementioned levels of textual interaction, for it is quite common that a single letter may include both text and images. While many researchers have focused solely on marginal imagery or the literary qualities of Michelangelo's letters, few studies have achieved what Highsmith suggests—to examine Michelangelo's words as works of art in their own right and to look at the narrative that runs below the surface of the text. Scholars working on Michelangelo's correspondence typically take the first two levels of textual interaction in isolation, either reading the text or studying the images. This study proposes the third level of interaction mentioned by Highsmith—that is, perceiving the letter as a whole, formal object. This exercise requires the viewer to look at script as strokes on a page, or as Highsmith asserts, to look at words as drawings.

Highsmith's theory serves as a valuable framework for this discussion of the social implications of text and the historical connotations that letter forms carry. Whether it be modern type or Renaissance script, Highsmith, among others, are correct in asserting text has the capability to communicate social messages and standards. What one says is important, but how it is presented can be equally important for shaping the image of an individual or larger entity.

A modern example of this concept occurred in April of 2012, when scientists working for the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) ignited internet outrage by presenting one of their most significant and highly-funded discoveries of the century, the Higgs boson particle, in Comic Sans font. Widely known for its playful and casual uses, Comic Sans was deemed an inappropriate choice for such a serious discovery

by many of the event's attendees, some of whom wrote nasty comments online about the organization's "irreverence to science."[10] Shortly after the conference, the controversial subject was picked up by major news outlets such as the Huffington Post and the New York Times. Interestingly, the font choice of one presentation by one organization launched a larger discussion on scripts and their reception, clearly demonstrating how the formal aspects of text have the power to illicit social response and how text relates to issues of self-presentation.

This anecdote is a valuable illustration of how of script continues to communicate societal norms. The chapter that follows posits that just as fonts carry messages and connotations in the modern era, so too did historical scripts used during Michelangelo's lifetime communicate their own stories, such as the author's education, occupation, and class. This chapter proposes that to Michelangelo and his contemporaries, personal script would have been a powerful and immediate indicator of status as well as a valuable tool in asserting one's class and membership among the educated and literate elite. Echoing Highsmith's sentiments, there is a complex narrative running beneath the surface of Michelangelo's letters, and to fully comprehend this narrative, it is first important to delve into the historical scripts used during his time.

[10] Michael Rundle, "Higgs Boson Discovery Announcement Made in Comic Sans," Huffington Post, United Kingdom, September 3, 2012, accessed at: http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/07/04/higgs-boson-discovery-comic-sans_n_1648494.html

Renaissance Scripts: The *Mercantesca* and the *Cancelleresca*

By the dawn of the Cinquecento in Italy, the "cult of antiquity" had been fully established, and classical forms were rapidly pervading the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture. One understudied aspect of Italy's cultural and artistic rebirth, however, is the art of writing and calligraphy, which underwent its own drastic, formal changes following the reintroduction, recirculation, and copying of ancient material by early humanist scholars such as Petrarch (1304-1374) and Coluccio Salutati (1330-1406). According to Stephen Herold, "books and their texts were the tools of the humanist, and so writing itself became a mark of humanistic identity as they sought to emulate the writing style of the ancients along with their works."[11] Scripts, therefore, became languages of sorts, communicating one's familiarity with the classical past as well as local tastes and trends.

By the end of the Trecento, two general categories of writing had emerged: the gothic family of script **(Figure 1.1)** that had been the prevailing style since the Middle ages, and the humanistic script—the new style of writing that was meant to emulate recently-revived classical texts. Explained fully by Brian Richardson, by the time of the Cinquecento, the most formal gothic scripts were restricted to liturgical books or official documentation and had largely fallen out of favor due to their difficulty to read and execute.[12] More common in the first half of the Quattrocento was a hybrid form of text known as the "semigothic", made popular by Plutarch. The semi-gothic script **(Figure 1.2)**

[11] Herold, *The Origins, Glory & Decline of the Humanist Cursive in Italy 1400-1650*, 6.

[12] Brian Richardson, *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 59.

exhibits some characteristics of gothic text, but introduces more widely-spaced, rounded letters as well as elongated, slanting, or even looping ascenders and descenders, seen especially in letters such as **d**, **p**, and **l**.

The variation of gothic script most relevant to this discussion is the "mercantile" or *mercantesca* script **(Figure 1.3).** Unlike more evenly-spaced, orderly, semi-gothic writing styles with free-standing letters, the *mercantesca* is a cursive script that features a number of joins and ligatures. Common characteristics of the *mercantesca* include the looping and rounded ascenders and descenders and a greater use of ligatures in letter combinations such as 'ch', 'gh', and 'gl'.

Originating in Florence, the *mercantesca* was a script generated by and for the merchant class. Popular in major mercantile hubs, the *mercantesca* rapidly spread throughout cities across Tuscany, arriving as far north as the Veneto by the beginning of the fifteenth century.[13] For the most part, the *mercantesca* was used for practical writing in the vernacular such as account books, business records, or business correspondence.[14] It was also used by merchants for personal writing such as private correspondence, notes, and formal letters. Unlike many later scripts that were regularized and exhibited little variation from person to person, the *mercantesca* was highly individualistic and varied greatly based on individual hands and even geographic locations. In various writing manuals published in the late 1500s, it is clear that there were different forms of the *mercantesca* in Venice,

[13] Irene Ceccherini, "Merchants and Notaries: Stylistic Movements in Italian Cursive Scripts," *Manuscripta* 53, no. 2 (2009): 239.

[14] Richardson, *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy*, 60.

Florence, Genoa, and Rome, to name a few; thus, the sender's place of origin was often immediately recognizable simply by their style of writing. Richardson and Petrucci note that even after gothic texts fell out of fashion, the *mercantesca* was preferred over newer scripts for bookkeeping because it was much harder to counterfeit or alter.[15] By the end of the sixteenth century and during Michelangelo's lifetime, the *mercantesca's* use was reserved almost exclusively for the merchant class and would have been associated with mercantile activities.

What became most popular in the Quattrocento were the various forms of humanist scripts developed and popularized by the papal scribe and secretary, Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459), and Nicolò Niccoli (1363-1437), an accomplished calligrapher and prominent book collector in the humanist circle of Cosimo de'Medici (1389-1464).[16] Both Bracciolini and Niccoli were in high demand for their skill at copying ancient texts in the *lettera antica,* or "antique letter" scripts, and were largely responsible for its spread among the circle of Florentine humanists. Also referred to as the *lettera formata*, this script is much like the modern roman type, with clear, upright letter forms featuring few joins or

[15] Ibid., 61.

[16] For more on Poggio Bracciolini and Niccolò Niccoli, see: Stephen Herold, Gay Walker, and Stanley Morison, *The Origins, Glory & Decline of the Humanist Cursive in Italy 1400-1650* (Portland, OR: Reed College, 2012), 9. Herold notes that since humanism was in favor with many of the popes of the fifteenth century, "Poggio was able to use his travels on official business also to search for lost manuscripts…it is because of him that many of the ancient texts still survive. Copied by him in his clear humanist book hand (none dated earlier than 1408), or by other scribes he trained or inspired, these classics were passed around the intellectual world of Italy, copied often and then later printed using typefaces based on these same humanist manuscripts."

ligatures **(Figure 1.4)**. Despite its title as "antique", the *lettera antica* was actually a derivative of the Carolingian minuscule, a style of writing present in the twelfth-century copies of ancient texts that Bracciolini and Niccoli would have been looking to for inspiration and emulation. James Wardrop explains that figures like Niccoli and Bracciolini would have likely known that the classic works they were copying were not written by the hands of the ancients. Rather, these texts and their scripts were the closest link to the classical world that they had; therefore, Niccoli and Bracciolini, along with the vibrant circle of Florentine humanists who were their patrons, were eager imitate them.[17]

In the 1420's, Niccoli invented the first form of italic, humanist script called the *cancelleresca* **(Figure 1.5)**, or "chancery cursive".[18] This script features slender, slanting letter forms and neat ligatures resulting in a script much easier on the eyes than its blackletter predecessors.[19] Originally intended for private, informal use, the *cancelleresca* was quickly adopted by professional scribes and prominent men of letters across the entire

[17] James Wardrop, *The Script of Humanism* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), 4. See also Stephen Herold, Gay Walker, and Stanley Morison, *The Origins, Glory & Decline of the Humanist Cursive in Italy 1400-1650* (Portland, OR: Reed College, 2012).

[18]Despite being labelled as a form of cursive, the *cancelleresca* is actually more like modern day print, for it features pen lifts between most letters and few ligatures.

[19] There are many different names and slight variations of the *cancelleresca* script, including the *cancelleresca corsiva*, the *cancelleresca formata*, the italic chancery, the *cancelleresca all'antica* (old-style chancery), or the *corsiva all'antica* (old style cursive). For ease and brevity, I am referring to this script simply as the *cancelleresca*, or the "chancery cursive." For examples of slight variations, see: Stan Knight, *Historical Scripts: From Classical Times to the Renaissance*. New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 1998. See also: Albinia Catherine De la Mare, *The Handwriting of Italian Humanists*. Oxford: University Press for the Association Internationale de Bibliophilie, 1973.

Italian peninsula. Favored primarily for its practicality, the *cancelleresca* generally appeared neat when written slowly and legible even when written rapidly. Furthermore, its slanting form was advantageous, for it took up far less space and used less expensive vellum and paper than bulkier gothic scripts, all while taking half as much time to write.[20]

Coming to the scene just before the printing press was invented in 1440, the *cancelleresca* was greatly influential for early print culture. In fact, the *cancelleresca* was among the first scripts printed in early writing manuals by Arrighi, Tagliente, and Palatino, making it one of the most standardized and widely-used scripts by the end of the sixteenth century. As indicated by its name, the *cancelleresca* was eventually adopted as the official script for the copying of documents in public offices and in chanceries from Rome to Tuscany and the Veneto. It was even adopted as the official script of the Papal Chancery where it was particularly popular amongst humanist popes.[21] By the early sixteenth century, the *cancelleresca* was the most frequently used script among men of letters in Italy.

The Social Divide: Renaissance Education and Epistolography

What is important about each of the aforementioned scripts is not necessarily their form, but rather their connotations and widespread use in various social contexts. Both originating within the Florentine cursive tradition, the *mercantesca* and the *cancelleresca*

[20] Herold, *The Origins, Glory & Decline of the Humanist Cursive in Italy 1400-1650,* 11.

[21] Ibid. Herold makes the interesting point that script was a way that popes were merging humanism with faith in Rome.

began as similar scripts in the middle of the thirteenth century, used by many segments of the population who were experimenting with the two styles and developing new letter forms. By the end of the fourteenth century, however, the two scripts had drawn apart, and had come to characterize two different professional, social, and cultural contexts. The *cancelleresca* became the script associated exclusively with notaries, chanceries, and humanists. The *mercantesca*, on the other hand, was the script of merchants and business people.[22]

One major factor contributing to the social division of scripts was the shifting nature of the educational system in the Quattrocento, which had become more and more specialized and increasingly hierarchical. As outlined by Robert Black in his recent book, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, elementary and secondary grammar schools in Italy witnessed significant changes in curriculum between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries due to the rapid influence of humanism and the increased study of ancient texts. Heavily influenced by Bracciolini, Salutati, and Niccoli, Renaissance educators reformulated their educational goals in order to align them with humanist concerns. Rather than offering the professional or clerical training that was common in the Middle Ages, the aim of most humanist educators was to produce free and civilized men of virtue and taste with a firm understanding of the "good and liberal arts."[23]

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[22] Ceccherini, "Merchants and Notaries: Stylistic Movements in Italian Cursive Scripts," 239.

[23] William Harrison Woodward, *Vittorino da Feltre and other Humanist Educators* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1963), ix.

From the writings of Renaissance teachers, grammarians, and schoolmasters, it is clear that there was a push by humanists to phase out the teaching of vernacular grammar in advanced schools, focusing instead on the *studia humanitatis*, a curriculum of grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and moral philosophy based on ancient authors in both Latin and Greek.[24] More than just a means of learning reading and writing, the *studia humanitatis* was regarded as the ultimate form of education that would cultivate an ideal society. As stated by Eugene Rice, a liberally-educated man was someone who had refined his sensibilities and molded his moral attitudes through study of antiquity, and "whose imagination was stirred by the ideal pattern of classical humanity, who modeled his life after the image of man in the Greek and Latin classics in the same way the Scipio and Caesar had kept before their eyes the image of Alexander."[25] In other words, the *studia humanitatis* was a way of life and a program that would mold students into eloquent, humanist citizens.

In some schools dedicated to the *studia humanitatis*, upper-level grammar courses featured a special emphasis on epistolography, or the art of writing letters based on classical rhetorical forms and traditions. From the sheer number of epistolary treatises and schoolbooks published by Italian schoolmasters and scholars during the Quattrocento and Cinquecento Italy, there seemed to be a culture of one-upmanship amongst public and

[24] Paul F. Grendler, "Schooling in Western Europe," *Renaissance Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 781. See also Robert Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[25] Woodward, *Vittorino da Feltre and other Humanist Educators,* xii.

private educators, each boasting their own methods for correctly instructing classical rhetorical style and the art of letter-writing in Latin.[26] Practically speaking, it was impossible to completely desert the vernacular; thus, many teachers introduced exercises that taught students to convert vernacular phrases into progressively more "ornate" Latin.[27] Rhetorical handbooks such as *Elegantolae* (1470) written by the Sienese teacher Agostino Dati (1420-78), turned to Cicero and Quintilian's letters for examples and methods for achieving Latin elegance and style.[28] Almost unknown in the medieval classroom, the newly-revived collections of Cicero's letters were employed as stylistic models in Italian schools and in grammar manuals of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, emulated both in form and content.[29]

Rarely discussed in histories on Renaissance education, however, is how the use of ancient texts in the classroom undoubtedly influenced the use of certain scripts, most notably the *cancelleresca,* which was no longer limited solely to scribes and men of letters, but was also being introduced to elite schools across Italy. As noted by both Paul Grendler

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[26] Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy,* 349-363. Francesco da Buti's *Regule grammatiales*, Stefano Fieschi of Soncino's *De prosynonymis* or *Synonyma sententiarium*, Giovan Mario Filefo's *Novum Epistolarium seu ars scribendi epistulas,* Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova,* and Niccolò Perotti's *Rudimenta grammatices* are just a few examples of such treatises or compendia. Letter-writing manuals such as those by Arrighi, Tagliente, and Palatino are a slightly different genre of writing, and will be discussed later on in this paper.

[27] Ibid., 351.

[28] Ibid., 360. This text in particular became wildly popular across Italy, and was printed over 100 times by the sixteenth century.

[29] Ibid., 353-355.

and Colette Sirat in their research on education and schools in Western Europe, contemporaries were quite aware that writing was an integral aspect of a holistic humanist education, and it was around this time that the conception of writing changed from a necessary skill to a carefully-crafted form of art. According to E.H. Gombrich, there were often heated debates among humanists, teachers, and scholars regarding the visual aspects of writing—most notably orthography and script—and determining a set of standardized rules that would be taught and applied by all. Figures like Niccoli and Bracciolini in particular were adamant that writing should return to its purest antique form, displaying classical proportions in scripts as well as classical spelling.[30] Every aspect of writing from language, and layout to beautiful script, therefore, became the focus of discussion and debate, and much attention was paid to the conventions of writing and the merits of different scripts. Aptly stated by Sirat, it became a general understanding in the Renaissance that, just as it was in ancient Greece and Rome, educated people were expected to know how to write. More specifically, beautiful handwriting became the one of the marks of good taste, elegance, morality, and style.

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[30] E.H. Gombrich, *The Heritage of Apelles: Studies in the art of the Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976), 103. E.H. Gombrich wrote that Niccoli and Bracciolini were regularly chastised by more conservative scholars favoring Medieval conventions for their emphasis on a text's visual style. Niccoli was the subject of ridicule on many occasions for his demonstrated obsession with antique proportions in architecture and script. Gombrich notes that Guarino wrote many invectives poking fun at Niccoli, such as one from 1413 where Guarino wrote, "Who could help bursting with laughter when this man, in order to appear also to expound the laws of architecture, bares his arm and probes ancient buildings, surveys the walls, diligently explains the ruins and half-collapsed vaults of destroyed cities, how many steps there were in the ruined theatre, how many columns either lie dispersed in the square or still stand erect, how many feet the basis is wide, how high the point of the obelisque rises. In truth mortals are smitten with blindness. He thinks he will please the people while they everywhere make fun of him…"

When discussing eloquence and elegance in epistolary style in both the classical age and the Renaissance, it is of utmost importance to note the etymology of the word "style", and how authors writing in the Quattrocento and Cinquecento would have applied and understood the term. In terms of origin, the modern word "style" is derived from the Latin term *stilus*, which was understood simply as a pen or tool for writing. In the early rhetorical writings of Cicero, however, the term *stilus* took on a more figurative meaning, referring to the way in which an individual wrote or presented oneself through the written word or in speech, as well as their behavior and conduct. In Cicero's *De Oratore,* for example, the author praises the "stilus optimus et praestantissimus dicendi," the "best and most excellent style of elocution," in addition to insisting, "Stilus exercitatus efficient facile hanc viam," or, "a practiced style might easily master this way' (of composition)."[31] Willibald Sauerländer writes that for Cicero and his contemporaries, the term *stilus* or *stilo* was one that was associated with discipline, control and polish—a normative term that could not be applied without respecting and obeying rules and prescripts.[32] Furthermore, Sauerländer asserts that *stilus* was a value-charged and even elitist concept that signified inclusion into a segment of the educated elite.

From ancient texts, it is clear that what began as a term for a writing utensil had slowly morphed into a way of describing an individual's overall manner or mode of

[31] Willibald Suaerlander, "From Stilus to Style: Reflections on the Fate of a Notion," *Art History* 6, No. 3 (September 1983): 254.

[32] Ibid.

expression, behavior, intellect, and their expected conduct.[33] For instance, following a description of Augustus Caesar's manner of dress and behavior in *De Vita Caesarum,* Suetonius dedicates a portion of the text to Augustus' manner of oration and writing, explaining that "he cultivated a style of speaking that was chaste and elegant, avoiding the vanity of attempts at epigram and an artificial order…making it his chief aim to express his thought as clearly as possible."[34] Suetonius goes on to explain that Augustus was known for his peculiar expressions and orthography, but that he noticed a "special peculiarity in

[33] There is a rich body ancient Greek literature, largely pseudepigraphical but still likely of considerable antiquity, that connects the *stilus* or calamus (quill) and handwriting to virtuous behavior. Interestingly, authors such as Plato, Euclid, and Homer are quoted in medieval and pre-modern texts on Islamic calligraphy, the highest form of art in many Eastern countries. In Franz Rosenthal's 1943 translation of Abū Ḥaiyān al-Tawḥīdī' tenth century treatise on penmanship, for example, the Islamic calligrapher included the following quotes by supposedly Western authors: "Euclid said: 'Handwriting is spiritual geometry which appears by means of a bodily instrument…'Homer said: 'Handwriting is something which the intellect causes to appear in the calamus by means of the senses. The soul, when confronted with handwriting, loves in it the first element…' Plato said: 'The calamus is the fetter of the intellect. Handwriting is the deployment of the senses, and the desire of the soul is attained through it…'Herodotus(?) or Menodotus(?) said: 'The calamus is the chief of wisdom. Handwriting is the master of the calamus. The idea is the rich gift of the intellect, and the good style is the ornament of the whole.' Galen said: 'The calamus is the physician of handwriting. Handwriting prescribes the diet of the soul, and the idea is the source (?) of health (correctness).' Aristotle said: "The calamus is the active cause, ink the elementary cause, handwriting the formal cause, and a good style the final cause…' Alexander said: 'Withouth the calamus a realm could not be properly administrated. Everything depends on the intellect and the tongue, because they decide everything and give information about everything, and the calamus shows you both intellect and tongue in (material) shapes and represents them to you in (material) forms…' See Franz Rosenthal, "Abū Ḥaiyān al-Tawḥīdī on Penmanship," *Ars Islamica*, Vol. 13 (1948), pp. 1-30. A complete list of quotes by Western writers are published on page 15.

[34] Suetonius and John Carew Rolfe, *The Twelve Caesars: The Lives of the Roman Emperors* (St. Petersburg, Fla: Red and Black Pub, 2008). This quote can be found in Book II: DIVVS AVGUSTUS, sections 84-88.

his manner of writing: he does not divide words or carry superfluous letters from the end of one line to the beginning of the next, but writes them just below the rest of the word and draws a loop around them."[35] Part of Augustus' virtue, Suetonius asserts, is writing to be understood rather than admired—an act that mirrors the ruler's humble character.

During the middle ages in Europe, *stilus* evolved into the modern term *style* (the French derivative) or *stile* (the Italian derivative). By the fourteenth century in Italy, the word *style* remained attached to the realms of literary composition, rhetoric, poetry, and elocution, however, it was around this time that its use was also introduced to arts such as music, painting, drawing, sculpture and architecture.[36] While still retaining its classical meanings, during the Renaissance *style* became synonymous with the French word *coutumes*—that is customs, habits, and manners in a social context. Interestingly, though, at the onset of the Cinquecento, writers such as Baldassare Castiglione and Giorgio Vasari altered the meaning of the the word *style,* using it to highlight an artist's personal genius and particularity. This effectively created a dual nature for the term, implying both inclusion to polished society and adhesion to norms while also serving as a way in which someone could stand out.

Taking all of this together, when schoolmasters and humanists mention the importance of modelling ancient texts and teaching students elegant classical Latin, wisdom, and eloquence, they are referring to something much larger than just learning

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Suaerlander, "From Stilus to Style: Reflections on the Fate of a Notion," 255.

grammar or handwriting in the classroom. Rather, they were referring to instilling in each pupil a cultivated way of life deeply rooted in antiquity. This manner of humanist living encompassed polished and disciplined ways of speaking, writing, dressing, and acting that a distinct class of people would have been familiar with. Writing and script was just one small aspect of achieving an overall refined style. Children lucky enough to receive a humanist education at school or with a private tutor or writing master were, therefore, being taught both practical skills and established moral and civic values. Their continued use of the *cancelleresca* in school, and eventually in correspondence later in life, was quite literally the mark of their education and classical values.

The use of the *mercantesca*, on the other, hand, communicated very different messages. Stated previously, the *mercantesca* was used almost exclusively by the merchant class and would have been taught in vernacular schools. Unlike the humanist schools with advanced classical curriculum focused on Latin and Greek grammar, rhetoric, and moral philosophy, the curriculum of vernacular schools in Italy was much more pragmatic. While some schools taught a little elementary Latin grammar, most focused on teaching vernacular literature and commercial mathematics called *abbaco*.[37] Grendler states that students attending vernacular schools were mostly the sons of merchants and craftsmen destined for the world of work. Their curriculum was derived from the practical experience and lay culture of the Italian merchant community of the later Middle Ages, and probably underwent little change during the Renaissance. Moreover, Grendler explains that

[37] Grendler, "Schooling in Western Europe," 783.

humanistic pedagogical theorists and municipal governments mostly ignored vernacular schools.[38]

In sum, an individual's use of a particular script made it immediately clear which social stratum they belonged to. If one were to use an elegant and clear *cancelleresca*, they were likely to have received a humanist education either in school or by a personal tutor or writing master. By contrast, if one were to write in a *mercantesca*, they were most likely a member of the merchant class using it for business purposes. The ranges in education during the Renaissance undoubtedly created and perpetuated societal divisions, and script was a visual byproduct of this divide. If "a word is like a drawing," telling a distinct story or narrative simply by its form as Highsmith asserts, then there are two very different stories being told by letters written in the *cancelleresca* versus those written in the *mercantesca* during the Quattrocento and Cinquecento. Keeping this in mind, it is now possible to examine Michelangelo's art of words, and the particular stories that they tell.

[38] Ibid., 784.

Chapter Two: Michelangelo's Calligraphy

For decades, scholars have scoured Michelangelo Buonarroti's extensive collection of letters for information regarding the artist, his artistic practice, his business affairs, and his personal relationships with family members and patrons. To this day, there are over 500 firmly attributed letters penned by Michelangelo himself—a staggering number for any historical figure of the Renaissance—in addition to hundreds of sketches and drawings that also include text by his hand. Within the last few years, there have been dozens of studies regarding the literary or poetic aspects of Michelangelo's letters; only three, however have addressed aspects of Michelangelo's script—an unpublished Master's thesis by Robert Tallaksen, a book by Deborah Parker, and a book by Lucillia Bardeschi Ciulich.[39]

So far, there has been one primary story presented by these authors about Michelangelo's calligraphy: that of evolution and change of over the course of the artist's long life. As made clear by Tallaksen, Parker, and Bardeschi Ciulich, Michelangelo shifted from using the *mercantesca* script to the *cancelleresca*—a phenomenon that, when taken in light of the history of scripts reviewed in Chapter One, would not have likely been a natural evolution. Considering the educational system during the Renaissance, students would have learned and used either the *mercantesca* or the *cancelleresca* for very specific

[39] See Lucillia Bardeschi Ciulich, *Costanza ed evoluzione nella scrittura di Michelangelo* (Firenze: Cantini Editore, 1989) and Robert J. Tallaksen, "The Influence of Humanism on the Handwriting of Michelangelo Buonarroti." Master's Thesis, College of Creative Arts at West Virginia University, 2005. For another brief overview of Michelangelo's evolving calligraphy, see the introduction of Deborah Parker, *Michelangelo and the Art of Letter Writing* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1-9.

purposes in school; therefore, a switch to a completely different type of script would have been uncommon and worthy of scholarly attention.

In his study of Michelangelo's handwriting, Tallaksen claims that between 1497 and 1502, the handwriting of Michelangelo underwent a sudden and distinct change from the *mercantesca* to the *cancelleresca*. Analyzing Michelangelo's scripts paleographically before and after 1501, Tallaksen argues that immediately after the turn of the century, Michelangelo made the conscious decision to modify his handwriting—a change, he asserts, that could not possibly be a demonstration of a naturally-evolving book-hand. Similarly, Deborah Parker notes that around 1501, Michelangelo shifted from using a hybrid form of *mercantesca* to the *cancelleresca*.[40]

Bardeschi Ciulich, on the other hand, argues that there was a much more gradual shift. She tracks subtle changes in Michelangelo's letters in each major period of his life from his early days in Rome to the last letter written by the artist in 1564. Unlike Tallaksen who examines only a handful of documents, Bardeschi Ciulich pays close attention to a wide range of texts, looking closely at how Michelangelo experimented with letter forms in official correspondence, unsent letter drafts, poetry, *ricordi* and *conti*, personal lists, and notes on sketches. Whereas Tallaksen focuses solely on the paleography of Michelangelo's letters, Bardeschi Ciulich attends also to Michelangelo's evolving orthography, a phenomenon that she arugues ran parallel to his evolving script. She concludes that along with other aspects of his letter writing, Michelangelo's orthography was in a constant state of flux until it ultimately evolved toward a normative state.

[40] Parker, *Michelangelo and the Art of Letter Writing*, 5-7.

Tallaksen, Parker, and Bardeschi Ciulich have demonstrated that Michelangelo's calligraphy underwent many significant changes throughout his lifetime, most notably shifting from a mercantile script to a humanist script. While Tallaksen and Parker in particular have presented valuable information regarding Michelangelo's initial stylistic conversion, little attention was paid to the later decades. This chapter will examine letters produced during the era of change proposed by Tallaksen and Parker, however, it will also address a much longer period where Michelangelo's script undergoes little, if any, variation. In other words, this chapter focuses primarily on a slightly different story of Michelangelo's handwriting, asserting that the narrative revealed by Michelangelo's scripts is not necessarily one defined only by evolution, but rather, one defined by anomalous, machine-like consistency after his initial stylistic conversion.

Contrary to the established notion that Michelangelo adjusted his script based on the genre of writing and the recipient, he in fact retained a consistent and idiosyncratic style of script for decades that appears in every type of writing that he undertook. This chapter seeks to demonstrate how Michelangelo's change in writing style was a deliberate act that mirrored other personal efforts he took to construct a distinct identity as an erudite member of humanist circles in Italy. To Michelangelo, personal script would have been a powerful and immediate indicator of his elevated status and an important tool for asserting his place among the Florentine and Roman literati.

Michelangelo's Early Writing Styles: (1496-1517)

From Table A1, it is apparent that Michelangelo rapidly adjusted his handwriting between 1496 and 1517, a twenty year period that began with the artist's departure for Rome at the age of 21 and was defined by travel and high-profile commissions throughout Italy.[41] The script in Michelangelo's earliest surviving letter, addressed to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici in 1496 **(Figures 2.1 and A2)**, displays Michelangelo's use of the Florentine *mercantesca*. Quite similar to the Florentine *mercantesca* printed in Palatino's writing manual from 1540, Michelangelo's script from 1496 retains standard aspects of the *mercantesca* that would have been taught in vernacular schools in Florence, such as the characteristic rounded letters with looping or whipping letter tails.[42] Like Palatino's model, Michelangelo's script at this point is vertical in nature, featuring an upright ductus that does not slant to the right or left. Take, for instance, the rigidly vertical forms of Michelangelo's **i**, **l**, **p**, and **q**, whose ascenders and descenders do not encroach on the space of the previous or following letters. In contrast to the elaborate looping or whipping ascenders and descenders seen in Palatino's *mercantesca*, however,

[41] See appendix on page 86. Table A1 is a compilation of ten of Michelangelo's letters set against the Florentine mercantesca printed in Palatino's writing manual in 1540 and the standardized cancelleresca printed in Arrighi's writing manual in 1522. Each letter is illustrated separately in the appendix for further reference.

[42] Parker, *Michelangelo and the Art of Letter Writing*, 5. Deborah Parker describes Michelangelo's script at this time as a "hybrid" script somewhere between the *mercantesca* and the *cancelleresca*. As mentioned in Chapter One, however, the mercantesca was a highly individualistic script, and varied greatly from person to person. This may be the reason for Michelangelo's deviation from what are supposedly the standardized mercantesca script printed in early writing manuals.

Michelangelo's ascenders and descenders are more contained, and only the tails of his **g**, **h**, **y** and **z** whip below the baseline.

Another defining feature of the Florentine *mercantesca* is the sloping, hook-like approach stroke, which can be seen especially in the hooking strokes of Michelangelo's **b**, **d** and **f**. When looking at the ascender of Michelangelo's **d**, for example, it is clear that Michelangelo took the basic looping form from the *mercantesca* and simplified it, forming only a hook rather than a full, closed loop. Tallaksen notes that in 1496, Michelangelo was also using common features of the *mercantesca* such as a single-compartment **a** made with one rounded stroke, the long **j** used in place of a final **i**, and the long **s** form.[43] Due largely to the fact that Michelangelo rarely picks up his pen and is using looping ligatures to connect many of his letters, this script may initially may seem visually busy and more heavily ornamented than later examples in the table. When looking closely, though, it is evident that this letter is clearly spaced and written with a degree of care appropriate for its recipient—a notable member of the Medici family and one of Florence's elite.

Michelangelo continues to use the same rounded script in a letter written to his father Lodovico in Florence in 1497 **(Figure A3)**. Similar to the letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, this script also exhibits looping or whipping ascenders and descenders in the letters **d**, **g** and **h**, and the long **s** form, but introduces very subtle changes that hint at a shift toward the *cancelleresca*. For instance, in comparison to the 1496 document, the ductus of the letters in 1497 begins to slant ever so slightly to the right. This

[43] Tallaksen, "The Influence of Humanism on the Handwriting of Michelangelo Buonarroti," 14-15.

adjustment can be seen especially in the letter **q,** whose spine was rigidly upright in 1496 but morphed into a diagonal line in 1497. While this could have been due to the speed in which the document was written, these letters suggest that Michelangelo was already being influenced by the slanting *cancelleresca* form popular amongst the humanists he would have been mingling with in Rome, Bologna and Florence. From these two early documents, it is important to note that at this time in his career, Michelangelo is using the same script for personal correspondence to his father that he is using for more official correspondence to important figures like Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici.

By the time that he drafted a contract regarding the Piccolomini Altar in Siena in 1501 **(Figure A4)**, Michelangelo appears to have dropped most of the traditional rounded *mercantesca* form, retaining only a few rounded letters such as **m**, **n**, and **u**. Instead, he began to introduce letters more linear in nature. In other words, whereas letters written in the *mercantesca* were said to have been inscribed within a circle due to their horizontal, looping forms, letters written in the *cancelleresca* conform to the shape of a rectangle and are more vertical in nature.[44] This change can be seen in Michelangelo's miniscule **g**, which he originally wrote in a wide and round form in 1496 and 1497. By contrast, in 1501, the tail of Michelangelo's **g** is closed**,** and the overall letter form is tall and slender, easily fitting into a rectangle. The shift toward a more vertical, rectangular form can also be seen in the letter **h,** which loses its rounded bow and whipping tail that falls below the baseline

[44] This idea is derived from principles outlined by Ludovico Arrighi's *La Operina* from 1522, which will be discussed at length in the following section. In this handbook of writing, Arrighi explains that all letters should spring from a basic geometric form. See also Tallaksen, "The Influence of Humanism on the Handwriting of Michelangelo Buonarroti,"8.

and is replaced by short, triangular strokes that remain above the baseline. For the most part, in this manuscript Michelangelo's looping, rounded ascenders and descenders of the earliest letter are gone, replaced by slender, elegant, diagonal, letter tails with few whipping flourishes. Furthermore, his ductus is drastically tilted to the right, a tell-tale mark of the humanist *cancelleresca*.

As Tallaksen points out, in some lines of the Piccolomini contract, Michelangelo seems to be mixing styles of writing, using both the *mercantesca* and *cancelleresca* simultaneously, making it clear that he was working to change his script and learn new letter forms. This can be seen in Michelangelo's treatment of the long **s**, which he writes in both the *mercantesca* and the *cancelleresca* style in the same line (**Figure 2.2 and A4**).[45] Also clear from this manuscript is that he is playing with his writing style by practicing letter forms made popular by prominent humanist scribes and copyists. For example, Michelangelo began using the majuscule **Q** for minuscule **q**, an iconic calligraphic feature seen in humanist scripts that was most likely used to avoid confusion with the minuscule **g** and **p** or one-letter abbreviations similar in form. Once Michelangelo integrated this form in his writing, he consistently used it through the remainder of his career. Another popular humanist form can be seen in Michelangelo's treatment of the letter **c**, which descends below the baseline and includes the following letter inside of it it **(Figure 2.3)**. Deborah Parker notes that all of these characteristics resemble traits found in the handwriting of famous copyists such as Bartolomeo Sanvito (1435-1518) and Antonio Sinibaldi (1443-

[45] Ibid., 15.

1528), whose work Michelangelo may have come in contact with while he was immersed in humanist circles either in Florence or Rome.[46]

This document is particularly rich with information because of the many operations taking place on a single page. In his book, *Michelangelo: A Life on Paper*, Leonard Barkan notes that there are at least two different hands at work on the recto and the verso **(Figures A4 and A5)** of this folio. Located in the top quadrant of both the recto and the verso, the first script is a *mercantesca* belonging to Michelangelo's brother Buonarroto, who is roughing out a letter referring to what appears to be a serious family issue given the dramatic use of terms like *morire* ("to die"), *dagli morte* ("to give him death"), *oltraggio* ("outrage"), and *scrisi invano none intesi mai parola* ("I wrote in vain, I never heard a word about it").[47] The second script is the aforementioned *cancelleresca* in Michelangelo's hand, which appears to be a draft in official language of his concerns regarding the Piccolomini contract, complete with a signature and date. Occupying the top of the recto and the majority of the verso are also preliminary figure drawings of a leg, hand, and the back of the body—presumably rendered by Michelangelo—as well as a few lines of poetry jotted in a more refined and decorative *cancelleresca*.

Questioning what is to be made of this strange amalgamation of text, image, and script, Barkan suggests that this page is an example of many individuals "practicing various forms of communication without having to concern themselves with the consequences of such communication reaching its intended goal." Barkan goes on to refer to this particular

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[46] Ibid., 6.

[47] Barkan, *Michelangelo: A Life on Paper,* 37.

sheet as "a place where people can talk to themselves without being overheard." In other words, even in the most private or mundane works on paper not meant for circulation, it is clear that Michelangelo and his family members were consciously practicing the presentation of their words—in both form and content.

When Michelangelo returned to Rome in 1508, the year that he began work on the Sistine Chapel, his writing style had almost reached its final normative form. In one of his most famous illustrated sonnets describing the toils and trials of working on the ceiling frescoes **(Figure A6)**, Michelangelo writes in a crisp *cancelleresca*, using sharp, diagonal forms that almost zig-zag across the page. Beautifully clear, this script was undoubtedly written with extreme care and precision. By looking closely at details from each individual line (**Figure 2.4**), one can see that Michelangelo was constantly lifting his pen, forming perfect, individual letters or using neat, razor-sharp ligatures when he did join letters or words.

When compared against Michelangelo's *mercantesca* from 1496, the difference is clear and the letter forms are even more simplified. For instance, when writing the letter **d**, Michelangelo replaced the rounded *mercantesca* hook on the ascender with a straight line. Instead of coming to an end at the baseline, the stroke touches the line and then the tail sharply juts up in a perfect diagonal which forms a hairline ligature to the next letter. This razor-sharp, v-shaped ligature is used in the tails of other letters such as **a**, **l**, **m**, **n** and **u**, and creates an overall crispness to the text and document as a whole. Much like a page from a printed book, Michelangelo artfully crafted a distinct spacing between letters, with his characteristic **c** falling below the baseline and aligning perfectly with the descenders of

his elegantly rendered **f**, **p**, and long **s**. Michelangelo's characteristic majuscule **Q** is used throughout the sonnet, as well as other elegant letter forms that he continues to use for the rest of his life such as his majuscule **f**, and the closed tailed **g**. At this point, the artist also eliminates *mercantesca* conventions such as the long **j** used in place of **i** at the end of words. Unlike the examples discussed from 1496, 1497, or 1501, which all retained traces of the *mercantesca* script, the sonnet from 1508-1512 is firmly rooted in the *cancelleresca*.

A short *quietanza* (receipt) from 1517 regarding receipt of money for work done on the façade of San Lorenzo in Florence **(Figure A7)**, appears to be one of Michelangelo's final experiments with his own script before he settled into the more normative style of writing that he would use for the remainder of his life. Even though the receipt was made out to Pope Leo X and the papal treasury, it is unlikely that it would have been passed to the pope himself. Regardless if this document was meant for the pope's eyes or one of his subordinates, Michelangelo continues to use his crisp and clear *cancelleresca*. It seems, however, that he is adding more ornamental flourishes and making his script much more decorative than any examples discussed thus far. Take, for instance, the long, sweeping tails of his majuscule **Q**'s that run the length of three letters in some cases and that culminate with a sharp uptick. Note also the whipping or curling tails of his **p**'s, and the exaggerated, elongated cross stroke in the final **e** at the end of the document. In this piece of correspondence, he also substituted the majuscule **F** in place of the lower-case **f**, making the headstrokes especially elegant with a delicate loop at the top. While still rooted in the classic forms of the *cancelleresca,* Michelangelo's script from 1517 displays a certain degree of inventiveness and creativity unique to this period.

Michelangelo's Late Writing Styles: (1522-1564)

To review, in the roughly twenty-year period between 1496 and 1517, Michelangelo made drastic and significant changes to his personal writing style. From the extant letters discussed so far, it is apparent that Michelangelo was trained to write in a variation of the Florentine *mercantesca*, which appears in his personal correspondence as early as the mid-1490s. Sometime before 1501, he began to mix in elements of the *cancelleresca* such as its characteristic tilting ductus and more vertical, rectangular-shaped letters with fewer whipping flourishes than their *mercantesca* predecessors. By 1508, Michelangelo was writing in a crisp, clear *cancelleresca* and had abandoned every aspect of the *mercantesca*. Finally, in 1517, having clearly mastered the standard features of the humanist script, Michelangelo was making the script his own, playing with unique letter forms and exaggerated flourishes. It can be concluded that at this point, Michelangelo was working toward a normative script that was synonymous with the humanist movement, but was also instantly recognizable as his own.

By 1522, the rapid evolution of Michelangelo's handwriting came to a halt, and Michelangelo settled into the final form of the *cancelleresca* that he used, almost completely unaltered, for the next four decades. This effectively launched the second period to be discussed in this chapter—the era of astonishing consistency in Michelangelo's handwriting spanning roughly from 1522 to 1564, the year of Michelangelo's death. Compared to the constant flux of Michelangelo's scripts from the first period, his script from the second period is remarkably precise. Looking again to Table

A1, Michelangelo obediently crafted each letter to conform to what had become his official script. From a to z, each letter was written identically from decade to decade, regardless of the artist's changing age, the circumstances of its production, or the recipient of the document.

When considered alongside the continual stylistic development of other manual acts such as drawing or sculpting throughout his career, it is odd, and undoubtedly significant, that Michelangelo chose to freeze his calligraphic forms, never to adjust them again. One possible explanation for such phenomenal consistency could be that Michelangelo was responding to the environment of increased professionalism in Italy, as well as trends within humanist circles to establish standardized scripts and orthography based on "antique models" that would be used by students and men of letters alike. It is hardly a coincidence that Michelangelo's script reached its normative state around 1522, the year that Ludovico degli Arrighi (1475-1527) published the first official writing manual dedicated to instructing proper Chancery Cursive, *La Operina da Imparare di scrivere littera Cancellerescha*. As a writing master and papal scribe in the Roman Curia, Arrighi sought to create a handbook that could be studied by professional writers and laymen that was printed in the very script it set out to instruct. Wildly popular in Italy, Arrighi published a similar woodblock printed manual in 1523, *Il Modo di Temperare le Penne,* which included a variety of different scrips in addition to the *cancelleresca*, examples of decorative printed capitals, and even labeled diagrams of a perfectly cut quill.

First pointed out by Tallaksen, Michelangelo's script of the second period conforms exactly to the rules established by Arrighi in 1522.[48] While it is impossible to know if Michelangelo owned a copy of Arrighi's *La Operina*, his letter forms certainly speak for themselves and suggest that he was directly influenced by the handbook. Compare, for instance, one of the opening pages of Arrighi's *La Operina* **(Figure 2.5)** with Michelangelo's script in a letter written between 1522 and 1523 to his good friend Giovanfrancesco Fattucci, the chaplain of the Florentine Cathedral **(Figure A8)**.[49] At the bottom of the page, Arrighi instructs the reader to begin forming a letter within "uno quadreto oblongo", or rather, an oblong square or rectangle. Using precise and calculated movements, Arrighi demonstrates how one is to begin with a thick, flat stroke that moves from the top right corner of the rectangle to the top left corner, then down to the baseline, forming a perfect right angle. From the baseline, the writer connects the bottom left corner of the rectangle to the top right corner with a sharp, crisp diagonal upstroke. The final stroke is determined on what letter the writer chooses to form, whether it be the short, midline downstroke of an **a**, the gently curving downstroke of a **d**, or the descender of a **g,**

[48] Tallaksen, "The Influence of Humanism on the Handwriting of Michelangelo Buonarroti," 8.

[49] Giovanfrancesco Fattucci was one of Michelangelo's closest confidants in Rome. As the chaplain of the Florentine Cathedral, Fattucci resided in the papal court and acted as a friend, representative, and devoted advocate for Michelangelo and his affairs in Rome. According to William Wallace, "Fattucci was approximately Michelangelo's age, learned in Latin, and was a sensitive reader and writer of poetry. Michelangelo, who was wary of corrupt and incompetent clerics, cherished this friend; they shared mutual trust and affection that lasted nearly forty years until Fattucci's death in 1559." See William Wallace, *Michelangelo: The Artist, the Man, and His Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 122-123 for more information on Michelangelo's close aquantances in Rome at this time.

which forms a bulbous curve and then tapers off into a thin point that barely kisses the base of the main body, creating a tear-shaped loop. Arrighi explains that the oblong rectangle is the base from which at least five letters spring—**a**, **d**, **c**, **g**, and the minuscule **q**.[50]

Michelangelo's script in the letter to Fatucci from 1522-1523 is thicker and bolder than his fine, twiggy script from 1508 and 1517, and resembles the heavy, printed quality of Arrighi's woodblock letters. Following Arrighi's precise formula, the bodies of Michelangelo's minuscule **a** and **d**, for example, conform perfectly to the shape of the oblong rectangle. Like Arrighi, Michelangelo's stroke moves counterclockwise from the right to the left corner of the imagined rectangle, touching the baseline and then ticking sharply upward in a perfect diagonal. Even the pooling of Michelangelo's ink at the top of his ascenders resembles Arrighi, which can be seen especially in Michelangelo's treatment of **d**, **h**, and **l**. Michelangelo's rendering of the letter **g** is particularly revealing as well, for it conforms exactly to Arrighi's standard, its thick tail tapering off into a fine point that seamlessly connects to the main body of the letter and forms the characteristic tear-shaped loop. Furthermore, Michelangelo's **v**'s and **u**'s appear to have serifs in many cases, a clear nod to printed letter forms.

Michelangelo's thick, seemingly printed *cancelleresca* appears unaltered decade after decade. Literally by the book, this perfect script shows up in every type of document penned by his hand with minimal errors, regardless of the recipient. For example, it can be

[50] Ludovico Arrighi, Giovanni Antonio Tagliente, and Giovanni Battista Palatino, *Three classics of Italian Calligraphy, an Unabridged Reissue of the Writing Books of Arrighi, Tagliente and Palatino* (New York: Dover Publications, 1953), 8. See also Tallaksen, "The Influence of Humanism on the Handwriting of Michelangelo Buonarroti," 21.

seen in a perfectly spaced draft of a letter written in 1533 to Michelangelo's dear friend and muse, Tommaso dei Cavalieri (1509-1587) in Rome **(Figure A9)**, as well as in a letter to his friend and colleague in Florence, Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) written in 1557 **(Figure A11)**. Furthermore, it appears in anything from poetry that Michelangelo sent as gifts or correspondence **(Figure A10)** to rather mundane correspondence between the artist and his father or nephew Lionardo. Amazingly, even in the very last letters written by the artist at the incredible age of 88, an age at which many other people would have someone else attend to their correspondence, Michelangelo retained his precise letter forms. Such dedication and discipline is clear in a late letter written in 1563 to his nephew Lionardo **(Figure A12)**. Despite its slanting lines and overall shaky quality, this letter displays Michelangelo's characteristic **c**'s that drop below the baseline and contain the following letters within its curve, his decorative, minuscule **Q**'s with their long, flicking tails, and his perfect, Arrighian **d**'s, **g**'s, and **u**'s. It is easy to image Michelangelo slowly and painstakingly crafting each stroke just as he did decades before, proudly displaying the continued mastery of his professional and personal humanist script.

Other Visual Devices

Despite the fact that the evolution of Michelangelo's script tapered off after 1522, he continued to play with the art of words and how he presented himself through text with other visual devices. Two letters in particular display Michelangelo's playfulness with text and image—the letter written between 1522 and 1523 to Fattucci **(Figure A8)**, and a letter containing four epitaphs in memory of Cecchino Bracci sent to Luigi del Riccio in 1544

(Figure A10).[51] In both of these letters, Michelangelo includes simple, calligraphic line drawings in the closing statements meant to complete the sentence. For example, in his letter to Giovanfrancesco Fattucci, Michelangelo signs the document with the phrase: "Vostro fedelissimo schultore in Via Moza, presso al Canto alla…" (Your most faithful sculptor in Via Moza near the Canto of…"), and then, as Barkan points out, instead of completing the address, he drew a round mill wheel to signify the location. Similarly, in the closing of his letter to Luigi del Riccio, Michelangelo wrote, "Vostro Michelagniolo al Macel de….", followed by a sketch of a small crow facing the sentence he had just written in place of the word *corvi*.[52] Written in the opposite direction of the four epitaphs, the viewer had to rotate the page to read the conclusion of the letter. Just like the Sistine sonnet, which included marginal imagery that corresponded to the text on the page, in these two letters image and text were interchangeable, each a surrogate for the other in a playful game of semiotics. Barkan notes that only individuals close to Michelangelo who knew his address or were familiar with Florentine geography would catch on to these little jokes and fully appreciate his play of words and images.

Michelangelo toyed not only with script and image, but also with physical aspects of the pages he wrote, using other visual devices to bring attention to the materiality of the object. There was at least one case where Michelangelo dyed his pages with pigment,

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[51] Luigi del Riccio was another of Michelangelo's closest friends in Rome whom the artist kept in contact with throughout his lifetime. Del Riccio's nephew, Cecchino Bracci was a pupil of Michelangelo who tragically died at the young age of 16. The epitaphs written by Michelangelo were dedicated to Bracci and sent to del Riccio as an act of condolence.

[52] Barkan, *Michelangelo: A Life on Paper*, 76-81.

making them even more like an art object. For instance, between 1525 and 1544, Michelangelo created a beautifully penned Platonic poem about the internal vs. external beauty on blue paper, which he alludes to at the very bottom of the page by writing, "Delle cose divine se ne parla in campo azzuro," ("one speaks of divine things on a sky-blue field").[53] Barkan, among others, refers to this manuscript as well as other documents with some sort of visual ornament such as the Sistine sonnet or the letters to Fattucci and del Riccio, as "presentation pieces"—that is, letters sent as gifts in some sort of social transaction. Written in an almost flawless *cancelleresca,* the script in these documents are so perfect that they almost appear as printed objects. More than just letters, these documents were created and understood to be whimsical art objects—a calling card of sorts highlighting Michelangelo's epistolary prowess, his unique script, and his wit.

Personal Attitude Toward Scripts and Self-Presentation

Michelangelo's attentiveness to personal script is thoroughly evidenced in his many letters, however, there are a few instances where he actually comments on the importance of handwriting and how one presents oneself through the written word. One figure who was constantly being chastised by Michelangelo for his poor script was Lionardo di Buonarroto Simoni, Michelangelo's young nephew. In one letter penned on June 5, 1546, Michelangelo, clearly frustrated by Lionardo's sloppy script, wrote:

[53] Ibid., 93-94. See also Bardeschi-Ciulich, *Costanza ed evoluzione nella scrittura di Michelangelo,* 50-53. The exact date of this manuscript is unknown, but Bardeschi-Ciulich dates the work between 1525 and 1544.

"...e non mi scriver più, che ogni volt ache io ò una tua lectera mi vien la febbre, tanta fatica duro a leggierla! Io non so dove tu ct'abbi imparato a scrivere. Credo se avessi a scrivere al maggiore asino del mondo, scriveresti com più diligentia..." (Don't write to me anymore; because every time I get a letter from you, I'm thrown into a fever, such a struggle do I have to read it. I do not know where you learned to write. I think if I had to write to the biggest ass in the world, it would write with more diligence.)[54]

Unfortunately, it appears Lionardo's handwriting never improved. In another letter written on March 3, 1548, Michelangelo repeats his exasperation with his nephew's illegible script, stating,

"*Lionardo, l'ultima tua lectera, per non la potere né sapere leggere, io la gictai in sul fuoco: però non te ne posso responder niente. Io t'ò scricto più volte che, ogni volta che io ò una tua lectera, che e' mi vien la febbre innanzi che io impari a lleggierla: però io ti dico che da qui inanzi tu non mi scriva più, e se tu ài da farmi intender niente, togli uno che sappi scrivere, che io ò il capo a altro che stare a spasimare intorno alle tua lectere*."[55] (Lionardo, I threw your last letter in the fire, not being able or capable to read it: hence I cannot answer you on anything. I wrote to you many times that, each time I receive a letter from you, I become ill before I am able to read it: so I tell you that from now on do not write me anymore, and if

[54] *Carteggio* 4: 242. See also Parker, *Michelangelo and the Art of Letter Writing,* 7.

[55] *Carteggio* 4: 293.

you need to make me understand anything, pick someone who is able to write, since I have things in my head more important than suffering in your letters.)

Michelangelo's apparent concern with his script, as well as the script of his immediate family members, is just one facet of his lifelong obsession with self-presentation and keeping up appearances. There is a wide range of documentary evidence that proves Michelangelo was investing considerable time, money, and effort into carefully constructing his own image as a member of the urban elite. Many of his own letters and meticulous accounts record his penchant for fine fabrics and sumptuous vestments—almost always in black, the color worn by and associated with noblemen and Florentine magistrates. William Wallace points out that Michelangelo kept an extremely detailed running record of his own wardrobe, listing exactly how many shoes (*scarpe* and *pianelle*), boots (*stivali*), stockings (*chalze* and *chalzoni*), chemices (*chamicie* and *maglie*), flowing garments (*saione* and *zimarra*), gowns (*lucco*), vests (*veste*), hats (*chapello*) and caps (*beretta*) that he currently owned or had purchased.[56]

From his inventory of fabrics, it is clear that Michelangelo invested in a wide range of textiles, from the basic *panno nero* to the finest sky blue saione, damask, black taffeta, and silk. Interestingly, all of these materials were not solely for his own clothes. In fact, according to Wallace, for twelve years he had all of his hosiery, as well as the hosiery of his assistants, made in the same stocking shop owned by Sandro Catastini calzaiulo.

[56] William E. Wallace, "Miscellanea Curiositae Michelangelae: A Steep Tariff, a Half Dozen Horses, and Yards of Taffeta," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (Summer,1994), 342.

Even the saddlecloth of his work mule was made from *panno nero*.[57] Furthermore, Michelangelo commonly sent fabric or clothing as gifts to people in his own social circle as well as prominent individuals such as the Flemish composer Jacques Arcadelt who had set one of Michelangelo's madrigals to music. [58]

Michelangelo's clothing was not the only way that he distinguished himself as a nobleman artist. Throughout his lifetime, he also hired or even bought horses for use—a luxury few, if any artists were able to afford. Wallace notes that since ancient times, owning a horse was the basis for a fundamental social distinction, and the fact that Michelangelo had owned at least five different horses during his lifetime signals the rise in the social stature of the artist in addition to distinguishing him from most other men of his occupation.[59]

The Making of the Myth

Taken together, all of these elements—from script to language to dress—contribute to the construction of the myth of Michelangelo and his divine *ingegno* cultivated and perpetuated by early biographers such as Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) and Ascanio Condivi (1525-1574). In his biography of Michelangelo, the figure meant to symbolize the zenith of high art, Vasari introduces Michelangelo as a savior sent by "the most benevolent Ruler

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid., 346.

[59] Ibid., 337-338.

of Heaven" who would rid the world of art from so many errors, and who, "working alone, was able to demonstrate in *every art* and *every profession* the meaning of perfection in the art of design." Vasari continues to praise Michelangelo as a singular wonder, an individual who "wanted to join to this spirit true moral philosophy and the gift of sweet poetry, so that the world would admire and prefer him for the wholly singular example of his life, his work, the holiness of his habits, and all his human undertakings, so that we would call him something *divine* rather than mortal."[60]

Emphasized alongside of Michelangelo's inherent divinity in his biographies was also the artist's nobility—a quality that contributed to elevating both Michelangelo as a person as well as his profession in general. The issue of Michelangelo's nobility has been a point of interest for scholars, for, as John T. Spike asserts, Michelangelo's ancestral claims to the prominent Canossa family do not hold up well under scrutiny.[61]

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[60] My emphasis added. Giorgio, Vasari, Julia Conaway Bondanella, and Peter E. Bondanella, *The Lives of the Artists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 414.

[61] John T. Spike, *Young Michelangelo: The Path to the Sistine* (New York: The Vendome Press, 2010), 11-33. According to John T. Spike, "Michelangelo's mother and father came from patrician families that had long filled offices in the republican government of Florence. Francesca de' Neri was a Rucellai, one of the best families, on her mother's side. His father, Lodovico di Lionardo Buonarroti Simoni, was descended from a long line of council members and *gonfalonieri*, or standard bearers. Lodovico, a 'good and religious man, somewhat old-fashioned,' transmitted his obsessive interest in the family dignity to his son. They traced their good name back to one Simone di Buonarrota, of whom we know little except that in 1295 he was a member of the powerful council of the One Hundred Wise Men. His descendents revered his memory." He then goes on to quote Condivi, who records, "Messer Simone then, of the family of Canossa, coming to Florence as Podestà in the year 1250, was deemed worthy of being made a citizen, and head of a sestiere or sixth-part of the town, because the city, which today is divided in quarters was then divided into six parts. The Guelph party were in power in Florence and he, who had been a Ghibelline, became a Guelph, because of the many benefits he received from that faction." Spike asserts that no gentleman corresponding to to this Simone of Canossa is listed among the

Interestingly, Vasari and Condivi approach the issue of Michelangelo's divinity and nobility in slightly different ways. Both, however, use his early education, training, and intellect as a means to communicate his significance. Vasari, for instance, chose to create a story of social mobility, writing that Michelangelo's father Lodovico was "not well off and had little income," and that "he placed his children in service with the Wool and Silk Guilds."[62] Because of his genius, though, Lodovico put Michelangelo in grammar school, a luxury not afforded to the other members of the family. Vasari described Lodovico's dismay when he found out that Michelangelo was spending all the time he could drawing in secret, an act for which he was "scolded and sometimes beaten by his father and his elders, since they probably thought applying oneself to a craft they did not recognize was a base and unworthy undertaking for their ancient house."[63] Vasari explains that eventually Lodovico gave in to the idea of his son pursuing the arts, obtaining an apprenticeship for Michelangelo in the workshop of Domenico Ghirlandaio, where the artist studied until he was taken under the wing of the Medici family as a young teen.[64]

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podestà, or magistrates, of the thirteenth century. Furthermore, Spike notes that Condivi's linkage of this Simone to the lineage of Matilda of Canossa is even more farfetched, for the great countess died childless—her only heir being the Roman Church.

[62] Giorgio, Vasari, Julia Conaway Bondanella, and Peter E. Bondanella, *The Lives of the Artists,* 416.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Jean Cadogan, "Michelangelo in the Workshop of Domenico Ghirlandaio," The *Burlington Magazine* 135, no. 1087 (January 1993): 30-31. While little is known for certain about his education as a child, it is generally accepted that Michelangelo was apprenticed in the workshop of Domenico Ghirlandaio by the age of 14, where he likely would have been familiarized with the scripts and writing appropriate for business transactions and the world of work. Cadogan cites a document found in the archives of the Ospedale degli

Condivi, on the other hand, was intent on obscuring Michelangelo's early formal training, choosing to focus more on his "divine inspiration" and noble blood than his more humble association with craft guilds or the workshop tradition.[65] Following a long introduction explaining Michelangelo's family lineage and connection to the great noble Canossa family, Condivi asserts that Michelangelo was born into an illustrious family, "a fine birth, certainly, and one which showed already how great the boy was to be and how great his genius."[66] Unlike Vasari's story of rags to riches, Condivi does not mention Lodovico's lack of income. Rather, he explains that, "recognizing his intelligence and anxious that he study letters, [Lodovico] sent him to the school of one Maestro Francesco da Urbino, who taught grammar at that time in Florence."[67] Like Vasari, Condivi then

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Innocenti that proves Vasari's account of Michelangelo joining the workshop of Ghirlandaio was well-founded. Vasari's own account states that the contract drawn up between Ghirlandaio and Lodovico Buonnaroti reads, "1488. On this day, the first of April, I record that I, Lovdovico di Lionardo di Buonarroti, place my son Michelangelo with Domenico and David di Tomasso di Currado for the next three years to come with these covenants and agreements: that the said Michelangelo must remain with the above-mentioned for the stipulated period to learn to paint and to practice this trade, and to do whatever the above-mentioned may order him to do, and, during these three years, the aforesaid Domenico and David must give him twenty-four newly minted florins—six in the first year, eight in the second, and ten the third, in all, a total of ninety six lire." This particular translation is from Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter E. Bondanella, *The Lives of the Artists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 416-417.

[65] Cadogan, "Michelangelo in the Workshop of Domenico Ghirlandaio," 3. See also Lisa Pon, "Michelangelo's Lives: Sixteenth-Century Books by Vasari, Condivi, and Others," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 1015-1037.

[66] Ascanio Condivi and Hellmut Wohl. *The Life of Michel-Angelo* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 6.

[67] Ibid., 9.

relates that Michelangelo, pulled by the heavens toward his destiny and backed by the encouragement of Francesco Grancacci, could not resist drawing and began to abandon his study of letters. Even more dramatic than Vasari, Condivi wrote:

> "His [Francesco Granacci's] effect was so strong, combined as it was with nature's constant stimulus, that Michelangelo completely abandoned the study of letters. On this account he was resented and quite often beaten unreasonably by his father and his father's brothers who, being impervious to the excellence and nobility of art, detested it and felt that its appearance in their family was a disgrace. Despite the very great distress this caused Michelangelo, it was nevertheless, not enough to turn him back…"[68]

Downplaying any association Michelangelo may have had with the workshop of Domenico Ghirlandaio, Condivi wrote, "I am told that Domenico's son attributes the excellence and *divinità* of Michelangelo to a great extent to his father's teaching, whereas he gave him no help whatever, although Michelangelo does not complain of this…"[69] Suggesting that Michelangelo had no formal training whatsoever, Condivi explains that Michelangelo was taken by Granacci to the Medici Garden in San Marco, where he studied and perfected his art. According to Condivi, Michelangelo's father resented Granacci for "leading his son astray, standing firm on this point: that he would never suffer his son to be a stonemason; and it was to no effect that Granacci explained to him how great a

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid., 10.

difference there was between a sculptor and a stonemason, and he argued about it at length…"[70]

Bound up in these biographical excerpts is a discussion of class and the elevation of the artist and his profession. From Vasari and Condivi's stories of Lodovico's displeasure with Michelangelo's artistic inclination, it is clear that there was an established social division between the world of the craftsman and the world of educated nobility. In each anecdote, Michelangelo was supposedly beaten and shamed for abandoning his studies and becoming a stonemason, a profession that Vasari and Condivi claim the family saw as a disgrace to their noble blood. It may not have been completely acceptable to be associated with humble workshop traditions for both authors, but it was significant and important for each writer to include that he was trained in the art of letters like children of aristocratic families. Echoing what was mentioned earlier, the way in which one wrote was literally a mark of class, and in each biography, the authors were asserting Michelangelo's elevated status from a young age due to his scholastic training, however brief it may have been.

Despite their efforts to conceal, muddle, or embellish Michelangelo's early education, the *mercantesca* script from his early letters written between 1496 and 1517 reveals the artist's humble roots and vernacular training. The rapid development and experimentation of his script in such a short time period reveal Michelangelo's efforts to disguise his roots by the adjustment of his personal writing style. His script was not the only aspect of his writing that revealed his roots, however, for his language was also an

[70] Ibid., 12.

indication of his background. While Michelangelo may have written in the *cancelleresca* script later in life, he still composed the majority of his letters in vernacular Italian. According to Wallace, Michelangelo would have considered himself "non lactinantes," that is, he had learned the rudiments of Latin grammar but not enough to read literature or apply it outside of the realms of church worship and business contracts. In a letter to Luigi del Riccio, Michelangelo admitted, "I should be ashamed, being so much in your company, not sometimes to speak in Latin, albeit incorrectly."[71] Furthermore, Wallace notes that in his *Dialogues*, another close friend, Donato Gionnotti, portrays Michelangelo as wondering whether or not it was possible to learn Latin in his seventies given that the Roman Cato the Censor had learned Greek in his eighties.[72] Clearly Michelangelo was concerned to some degree with the learning the *lingua franca* of the highly educated throughout his lifetime; having never done so, he could at least feign some sort of knowledge in a visual way by writing in the so-called script of the ancients, the *cancelleresca*.

Biographers continued to construct the myth surrounding Michelangelo through anecdotes of his miraculous achievements and sly trickery. Themes present in these stories include the revealing nature of a simple mark and how the stroke of a hand can verify the identity, character and virtue of the artist. In some cases, the anecdotes of Michelangelo mirror those of Giotto, or other fathers of the Renaissance, effectively aligning him with

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[71] Wallace, *Michelangelo: The Artist, the Man, and His Times*, 40-41. Wallace is quoting the letter between Michelangelo and Luigi del Riccio that can be found in Carteggio: 4: 177; trans. Ramsden 2:35.

[72] Ibid., 41.

other "divinely inspired masters" who were able to display their genius and originality through simple mark-making.

For example, in his chapter on Giotto, who he deems the father of the Renaissance, Vasari tells the story of a visitor from Rome in search of the most talented artist. To demonstrate his artistic skill, the young Giotto picks up his stylus and draws a perfect O, which stunned the talent scout. Through the making of a simple, yet impossible mark, Giotto displayed his superhuman mastery of the arts. Similarly, this trope is repeated in Condivi's biography of Michelangelo. As outlined by Condivi, when Michelangelo carved a forgery of an ancient sleeping *Cupid*, the cardinal who acquired the work sent an assistant to Florence to find the author of such deception. Eventually directed to the house of Michelangelo, he asked the artist to show him some work. Not having anything to display, Michelangelo took a pen and made a rapid drawing of a hand so perfectly made that the visitor was astonished. When the gentleman probed the artist further, Michelangelo confirmed what was now suspected, that he had indeed made the *Cupid*.[73] In his book, *A Brief History of the Artist from God to Picasso,* Paul Barolsky aptly states that fables such as the story of Michelangelo's *Cupid* reveal a pre-modern connection between mark-making, identity, and genius. To Vasari and Condivi, therefore, authorship and originality are revealed through the hand of the artist and the marks that he makes.

At the heart of these anecdotes is the same story underlying Michelangelo's handwriting. Michelangelo's perfect, humanist script was as much a game of visual

[73] This story and concept is outlined in Paul Barolsky, *A Brief History of the Artist from God to Picasso* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 89-92.

trickery as his sleeping *Cupid*—a powerful demonstration of his talent, intellect, and mastery of all forms associated with the antique. By using the script favored by the Florentine nobility, he was essentially aligning himself with a whole context outside of the vernacular, merchant society from which he originated. Furthermore, his iconic style of writing served the dual purpose discussed in Chapter One of including him in an elite group of Italian literati while also allowing him to stand out as an individual. Michelangelo's letters and his idiosyncratic script were quite literally his calling cards, immediately communicating his style, his elevated class, his classical tastes, and even what Vasari and Condivi would claim was his divinely inspired genius. His script, therefore, was an important facet of his self-presentation, and undoubtedly contributed to the myth surrounding him that set him apart from others of his occupation.

Chapter Three: Calligraphic Trends Among Other Artists in Renaissance Italy

Over the course of this discussion, it has been noted that there are a series of complex narratives running below the surface of a written letter. Through its form alone, script carries its own subtext that informs its reader of a particular background or context associated with the hand that created it. As we have seen, an intriguing narrative of self-fashioning and social mobility emerges from Michelangelo's changing letter forms. The significance of Michelangelo's calligraphic overhaul, as well as his demonstrated consistency in using the *cancelleresca*, can only be fully understood when examined against the script of other artists and craftsmen working in Italy during the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento. While there have been a handful of studies mentioning the peculiarity of Michelangelo's script, nothing has been made of how his script compares to that of his contemporaries. As a high-profile artist who garnered a great deal public attention throughout his career, Michelangelo was a source of emulation to a number of followers for his artistic style. Was his style of writing, therefore, also a model for emulation, or was Michelangelo simply adhering to established trends?

This chapter asserts that writing in the *cancelleresca* would have been an uncommon act for the average artist or craftsman working in or around Florence during the Quattrocento. While there were a number of artists playing with their own variations of the *mercantesca* in ways that reflect their artistic tastes and personal influences, overall, few were writing fully in the *cancelleresca* before 1500 as Michelangelo was adeptly doing by the turn of the century. Around the dawn of the Cinquecento, however, it appears that other

artists began introducing *cancelleresca* forms into their script. This was especially the case for high-profile artists such as Leonardo da Vinci (1452 -1519) and Raphael Sanzio da Urbino (1483-1520)—the other two members of what is commonly referred to as the divine triad of Renaissance masters—who were also taking liberties with their own scripts and breaking away from the style of writing that was the norm within their profession in the 1400s. As we shall see, it appears that like Michelangelo, these artists were adjusting their personal writing styles in ways that made them stand out from other artists in the merchant class by creating unique forms of mark making that became synonymous with their names and artistic pursuits. Ultimately, this chapter proposes that by first quarter of the Cinquecento, a time in Italian history when individual creative genius and innovation began to supersede traditional or more normative styles, script became an integral aspect of personal identity creation and professional reception for a Renaissance artist.

The Florentine Mainstream

As mentioned in Chapter One, the *mercantesca* was the predominant script among professionals within the mercantile community for the majority of the Quattrocento. All products of similar commerce-based vernacular schools, craftsmen such as goldsmiths, architects, sculptors, painters, and miniaturists each made use of the *mercantesca* script for both their personal and professional writing. From *catasto* declarations, confraternity records, and personal letters preserved and published in compendia such as Carlo Pini's *Scrittura di Artisti Italiani (Secolo XIV-XVII)*, it is clear that for the most part, artists working in or around Florence continued to write in local variations of the *mercantesca*

well into the late sixteenth century. Most common in Florence was the rounded style of the *mercantesca* with lopping and whipping letter tails similar to what Michelangelo was using in the early 1490s. Luca della Robbia (1400-1482) and Andrea del Verrocchio (1435-1488), for example, were both using this script in their tax declarations submitted for the *catasto* of 1451 and 1481 **(Figures 3.1. and 3.2)**. Present in each of their personal variations of the *mercantesca* is the characteristic upright ductus and the looping ascenders and descenders that align perfectly with Palatino's model of the Florentine *mercantesca* shown in the first column of Table A1. Written precisely and neatly, the ascenders of each artist's **d**, **l,** and **b** form wide, round, closed loops that are quintessentially mercantile in form. Similarly, the tails of each **h** curve below the baseline and whip across the page, connecting to the subsequent letter from below. Despite the fact that della Robbia's script is more rounded and looping in nature than Verrocchio's, both scripts epitomize the basic *mercantesca* form that artists and craftsmen would have learned through their vernacular training in the early Quattrocento.

In some cases, traces of an artist's taste and artistic influence can be isolated in their personal variations of the *mercantesca*. For instance, in an autograph letter written in 1459 **(Figure 3.3)**, Benozzo Gozzoli (c. 1421-1497) fused elements of traditional blackletter texts with the *mercantesca.* Gothic features evident in Gozzoli's script include a heavier stroke weight, angular letter forms, and shorter ascenders and descenders—a feature that allows the text to be closer together and more laterally compressed. Gozzoli's **d**'s in particular reflect the artist's interest in gothic letter forms, featuring thick, angular descenders that jut sharply to the left in a counterclockwise direction. Heavily steeped in

the International Gothic tradition, Gozzoli successfully translated aspects of his painterly style into his personal writing style, creating a visual link between his professional and personal artistic output.

In contrast to Gozzoli's decision to fuse more traditional letter forms with the *mercantesca,* other artists chose to introduce more contemporary letter forms into their writing styles. This was especially the case among artists working closely with Florentine humanists like Bertoldo di Giovanni (1430-1491), a sculptor and medalist who was a mentor and teacher to Michelangelo when he was taken in by the Medici family as a teen. Working closely with the Medici family for most of his career, Bertoldo was hand-picked by Lorenzo to oversee the collection of antiquities that the family had amassed and was displaying in their garden near San Marco. He was also chosen to serve as a teacher and director in the painting and sculpture school that the family established, and was undoubtedly entrenched in humanist culture. Bertoldo's hybrid script in a letter to Lorenzo de' Medici **(Figure 3.4)** suggests that he was influenced by humanist scripts, for it shares elements of both the *mercantesca* and the *cancelleresca*. At first glance, his writing appears to be a simplified version of the *mercantesca,* featuring an upright, vertical ductus but fewer looping and curving ascenders and descenders than the scripts of della Robbia and Verrochio. The first line displays many characteristic features of the mercantile script, such as the hooked long **s** made with one stroke and the long **j** form used as a final **i** in the word "volessi". Moreover, the **h** appearing in the final word "chapo" is especially mercantile in form, with its two large loops formed with a single stroke that flows directly into the next letter. For the most part, though, his letters are straight and linear, and many

were rendered individually as free-standing forms—all basic features of the *cancelleresca*. While it was certainly not the norm for artists to be writing in hybrid scripts at this time, as evidenced by Bertoldo's script from the late 1490s, it was not completely unheard of for individuals to be displaying subtle features of the humanist script in their variations of the *mercantesca* by the end of the century.

High-Profile Artists: Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael

Based on the limited number of extant or accessible documents penned by everyday artists working in Florence during the Quattrocento and Cinquecento, it is difficult to hypothesize if and how many artists were adapting their personal scripts over the course of time as Michelangelo was doing during his career. Because of the amount of time and practice that would have been involved in learning a new script, it is highly unlikely that scores of artists would have made the effort to completely and drastically overhaul their handwriting unless there was a pressing reason to do so. For the average craftsman working in the late 1400s, writing in the *mercantesca* would have been both expected and acceptable for individuals of their status. More prominent artists with high-profile patrons and commissions across Italy, however, seemed to have used refined or unique script as a way to elevate their status. From the wealth of preserved documentation published on artists such as Leonardo and Raphael, it is possible to postulate that Michelangelo was not the only major artist working around the turn of the century paying close attention to how he presented himself through the written word.

Leonardo is an especially intriguing case study, for his personal script was just as inventive as his other innovations in the mediums of painting, architecture, and mechanics. Known to many in his day as a *mancino*, or "lefty", oddly, Leonardo never retrained himself to write with his right hand like his left-handed contemporaries had done. A short excerpt from the autobiography of another *mancino*, Raffaello da Montelupo (c. 1504-1566), explains that Michelangelo himself was left-handed, but had trained himself to use the right hand for everything "except for actions requiring force".[74] Writing about his own left-handedness in 1560, Raffaello explains that artists working with their left hands were met with wonder and surprise, since most teachers insisted that students switch hands in school unless they displayed exceptional handwriting with the left hand.[75] Leonardo, therefore, would have been met with wonder by his contemporaries if he was using his left hand to write, draw, and design.

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[74] Carmen C. Bambach, Rachel Stern, and Leonardo, *Leonardo da Vinci, Master Draftsman* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003), 45.

[75] Ibid. Raffaello wrote: "I will not omit to say that by nature I am left-handed, and, finding that hand more facile than the right one, I used to write with it, since my teacher did not mind, being satisfied that my handwriting was good. I have therefore always used the left hand, be it for writing, be it for drawing some designs from the *Morgante*, which was used for reading at school...many were astonished, thinking that I wrote 'all'ebraica' ['Hebrew-style,' hence right to left] and that [my writing] could not be read later…As I have already said, I draw better with the left hand, and once when I found myself drawing the 'Arco di Trasi al Colosseo' [the Arch of Constantine], Michelangelo and Sebastiano del Piombio passed by and stopped to watch me. It should be prefaced that both of them, though naturally left-handed, did everything witht their right hand, except actions requiring force. So they stayed a long time to watch me with great wonder, because, as far is known, the two of them never made anything with their left [hand]." For an Italian translation, see Riccardo Gatteschi, *Vita di Raffaello da Montelupo* (Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, 1998), 120-121.

Even more striking than his left-handedness to his peers was his propensity to write in a reverse script that travelled from right to left and was only able to be read by moving a mirror along the page. In his treatise on mathematics written between 1496 and 1498, *De viribus quantitatis*, Leonardo's close friend and collaborator Fra Luca Pacioli (c. 1445-1514) made overt reference to Leonardo's handwriting, confirming that his script "is left-handed and could not be read except with a mirror or by holding the back of the sheet against the light."[76]

While sources such as Pacioli confirm that Leonardo was writing with a reverse script in the 1490s, it is unclear when exactly Leonardo learned this unique form of mirror writing and adopted it as his primary script. Scholars agree that he must have picked it up sometime before 1473, the year of his earliest dated work, a drawing of the Arno Valley with an autograph inscription in the top left corner **(Figure 3.5)**. Written right to left, the script of Leonardo's inscription is elaborate and calligraphic, featuring curling and curving flourishes that dance across the page.[77] This inscription displays Leonardo's keen interest with the decorative Chancery Cursive used by notaries like his father, a prominent and successful Florentine notary, Ser Piero da Vinci (1427-1504). His letters tails, intertwined like a mass of curled ribbons, overlap and connect to other letters both above and below each line. Clearly not an official form of Chancery cursive, Leonardo's earliest documented

[76] Ibid., 32.

[77] When reversed, this inscription reads "di di s.ta Maria delle Neve/ adj 5 daghossto 1473."

script is pure invention—a genius and masterful rendering of both *cancelleresca* and *mercantesca* forms written flawlessly in reverse.

An even more elaborate rendition of his reversed hybrid script can be seen in another inscription on his next firmly attributed work, a study of heads and machines from 1478 **(Figure 3.6)**. Much longer than his first two-line inscription listing only the date, this portion of text records the artist's affection for a certain Fieravanti di Domenico in Florence, stating, "Fieravanti di Domenicho in Firenze e chompar/ amantissimo quanto mio…"[78] Like the first example, this script displays elements of both the *mercantesca* and an elaborate *cancelleresca* simultaneously. For instance, when reversed or read with a mirror, words from the first line like "Fieravanti" include features of the *mercantesca* such as the upright ductus and rounded, ligatured letters. Furthermore, Leonardo is using the long **j** at the end of the first word and the long **s** form in the word below it. He also includes the characteristic closed-loop descenders seen in the more traditional variations of the *mercantesca* penned by Lucca della Robbia or Andrea del Verrochio. Toward the end of each line, Leonardo's tidy *mercantesca* morphs into a beautiful *cancelleresca* with letter tails that spiral in continuous loops above and below the baseline like small line drawings. Above the word "Firenze", Leonardo draws a delicate notarial flourish that floats independently above the script penned below it. Clearly fascinated with this decorative and elaborate *cancelleresca* form, Leonardo copies it again and again throughout the page,

[78]Rosand, *The Meaning of the Mark: Leonardo and Titian*, 17. Below the first two lines of the inscription is one of Leonardo's common abbreviated notations, "In dei nom," short for "In dei nomine" or "In the name of God". Below that, Leonardo repeats the phrase from the second line of the inscription, writing "amant[issimo] quanto."

intermingling isolated calligraphic forms with his full sketches **(Figure 3.7).** Through such an exercise, Leonardo effectively blurred the lines between drawing and writing. At this point in time, Leonardo seems to be paying as much attention to developing his personal script as he is in developing his skill as a draughtsman.

Curiously, by the late 1480s, Leonardo had abandoned his elaborate reversed chancery script. Despite his demonstrated skill at writing in the *cancelleresca*, he adopted a streamlined *mercantesca* that he continued to use and tweak for the next few decades. Unlike Michelangelo, who wrote each letter with astonishing consistency year after year, Leonardo displays little, if any, continuity in calligraphic form throughout his career. Moreover, the artist appears to have never developed a truly normative style of writing. Compare, for instance, Leonardo's very basic, simplified *mercantesca* seen in the *Codex Trivulzianus* **(Figure 3.8)** with the decorative, looping *mercantesca* gracing the page of his famous drawing of the Vitruvian Man from 1490 **(Figure 4.0)**. The first document—a page from the codex of Latin words Leonardo was developing for personal study—is almost completely void of ornamental forms. The final **e**'s in the first column of words, for example, are so simplified that they are rendered with two dots. By contrast, the decorative, flourished script of the second document—a drawing demonstrating Vitruvius' canon of ideal proportions—is work of art in itself, displaying perfectly proportioned letters rendered in the classic looping mercantile form. Yet other scripts from the same time period are entirely different. In a detail of Leonardo's writing from a study of a lathe **(Figure 3.9),** the artist is again using a hybrid script that draws from both *mercantesca* and the *cancelleresca* scripts. Written in reverse but still legible are the upright, simplified letters

similar to those in the *Codex Trivulzianus*, however, also visible are the majuscule humanist **Q**'s that Michelangelo favored in his own writing. It seems that the only consistent feature among Leonardo's experimental scripts was that they were all written in reverse.

Just as he must have tinkered and toyed with his inventions, Leonardo constantly experimented with his script, introducing new letter forms here and there but always writing them from right to left. Clearly far less concerned with writing in a consistent or perfect humanist script than Michelangelo, Leonardo's manner of writing was much more practical. As stated by Carmen Bambach, scientific research suggests that for "lefties", mirror writing would have come more easily with practice than writing in a conventional left-to-write script, as the hand moves with less effort and, staying ahead of the writing, does not smear the ink.[79] In addition to being a pragmatic decision for a left-handed writer, Leonardo's choice to consistently write in reverse would have also been relevant to his scientific research and interest in optics. Thus, his script would have been a sort of branding or advertisement for the work that he was known for.

While some pre-modern writers like Pacioli approached the topic of Leonardo's script with amazement, others writers were not so approving. Giorgio Vasari, for example, disliked Leonardo's handwriting, declaring that he "wrote in letters of ill-shaped character, which he made with the left hand, backward; and whoever is not practiced in reading them cannot understand them, since they are not to be read save with a mirror." [80] Regardless of

[79] Bambach, *Leonardo da Vinci, Master Draftsman,* 31.

[80] Ibid. 32.

its approval or disapproval, Leonardo's script was absolutely a topic of discussion during his time and was a facet of his professional reception. Whether it was a matter of pragmatism or novelty, Leonardo was, and is, still associated with his attention-grabbing script.

Far less challenging to read than Leonardo's script, Raphael's script is another exceptional case study for Renaissance artists working in the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento. Along with Michelangelo and Leonardo, Raphael did not receive a formal humanist education and the majority of his extant correspondence is written in vernacular Italian. His handwriting, however, was a model of humanist perfection and was as fine as the script of any classically educated literato. As the son of a successful court painter and poet, Giovanni Santi (c. 1435-1494), Raphael was fortunate enough to have been spent most of his formative years in the Montefeltro court of Urbino, a hub of humanist activity renowned for its great library and thriving scriptorium second only to the Vatican library. Here, the artist would have encountered humanist texts and scripts on an everyday basis and would have likely been familiar with the foremost trends in calligraphy.

Raphael must have mastered the *cancelleresca* by his early twenties, for his earliest surviving document, an autograph letter written to Simone Ciarla on April 21, 1508 **(Figure 3.11)**, displays a beautiful, clear *cancelleresca.* In this document, each letter is perfectly proportioned, with every minuscule written at exactly the same height. His letter forms are simple and crisp, compactly spaced and rendered so deftly that they appear to have been machine printed. Furthermore, Raphael slowly and carefully penned each letter individually, paying close attention to retaining consistency among his letter forms and his

spacing throughout the document. Unlike Michelangelo and Leonardo, Raphael's earliest dated script reveals no traces of the *mercantesca* or even any traces of vernacular training. Whipping or looping flourishes are completely absent from his script, and the only overt ornamental features in his letters are gentle curves at the base of each letter tail. At the young age of 25, Raphael had achieved a script that would have likely been impressive, even enviable, to those who encountered it.

Like Michelangelo, Raphael continued to use the *cancelleresca* for his personal notes or preliminary drafts not intended for the eyes of others. This can be seen in a draft of his sonnet, *Li è un pensier dolce* **(Figure 3.12)**. While not as perfect as the script in his earliest letter, Raphael is still using a clear *cancelleresca* featuring neatly rendered letters with few ligatures and a measured spacing. Unlike Michelangelo who was concerned with retaining each letter form consistently throughout his drafts, Raphael was much more flexible in this regard. For instance, each **g** in this page is written differently—some with tails that culminate in a closed loop and others that are written as an open loop. It seems that for Raphael, content was more important than perfect form in his preliminary drafts of writing.

Although Raphael's earliest letters displayed a mastery of the *cancelleresca*, he did continue to subtly develop his letter forms over time, introducing more elaborate or decorative flourishes little by little. For instance, in the draft of agreement between the Raphael and his prospective patrons, Francesco di Domenico Bonello and Giuliano Leno, written in 1514 **(Figure 3.13)**, Raphael made changes to his ductus, slanting it noticeably to the right. Raphael also lengthened his letter forms, making them long and elegant.

Furthermore, he adjusted each ascender to curve gently to the right, rather than standing straight and upright as was the case in his earliest letter from 1508. The most significant changes can be seen in his lower case **f**'s and **z**'s, which he formed with narrow loops and exaggerated strokes. The script in this manuscript is crisp, elegant, and clear, and there is an overall harmonious quality to the document.

Raphael continued to make minor adjustments to his script right up until his death in 1520 at the young age of 37. In a *Mandato camerale* in favor of Raphael from 1580 **(Figure 3.14)**, the artist signs the document in a slightly different script from that seen in the aforementioned figures. Here, his letters take their most decorative form, featuring wide, sweeping, wispy letter tails. Take, for instance, the beautifully balanced script that makes up his own name. The tail of the letter **p** is wide and curled, sweeping far below the baseline but is harmoniously offset by the long, sweeping ascender of the following **h,** which curves in the opposite direction. With a larger amount of space between each letter, Raphael's script is easy on the eyes and moves seamlessly across the page without errors or hiccups.

Had Raphael lived another few decades, he likely would have continued on the trajectory toward increasingly elegant letter forms. Regarded as a child prodigy by his contemporaries for his artistic accomplishments, his flawless script would have contributed to his reputation as an artist operating above the norm. In biographies or discussions of Raphael and his work—both historical and contemporary—terms like "refined", "gentle", "harmonious", "ideal", and "sublimely beautiful" have become ubiquitous with his name. His script arguably displays all of these qualities as well, and like the other artists

mentioned, would have been a sort of personal branding for the Raphael, his unique style, and his noble background.

Professionals of the Cinquecento

The writing styles of Michelangelo, Leonardo, and Raphael were exceptional cases in the late 1400s. By the mid 1500's, however, seemingly every Florentine artist wishing to make a name for themselves found it necessary to write in the *cancelleresca*. It comes as no surprise that this phenomenon coincides with the age of printed materials and the large-scale shift in cultural attitudes regarding the value of the arts, the status of the artist, and professionalism in general during the second half of the Cinquecento. As explained by Douglas Biow in his book, *On the Importance of Being an Individual in Renaissance Italy*, the Cinquecento was the age of specialization and professionalization in Italy. During this time, there was a profusion of manuals written by artists, craftsmen, and scholars from all backgrounds ranging from abstract humanist treatises written in Latin or a polished volgare to practical manuals that were purely instructional in nature.[81] It was through the written word that practitioners of the various arts sought to enhance their particular profession, endowing it with prestige and making a claim for its cultural value. More importantly, through the process of writing such treatises, these professionals were promoting themselves and seeking to elevate their own position in society. As stated by Biow, "in

[81] Douglas Biow, *On the Importance of Being an Individual in Renaissance Italy: Men, Their Professions, and Their beards* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 35.

rhetorical terms, they were establishing their exemplary 'ethos', or character, in the context of their expertise as professionals, and to be sure, as men worthy of recognition."[82]

Referring to these publications as "ego documents", Biow notes that discourses about the arts such as Giorgio Vasari's *Lives* (1550 and 1568), Baldassare Castiglione's *Il cortegiano* (1528), and Benvenuto Cellini's treatises on goldsmithing and sculpting (1568) are examples of some of the most aggressive forms of self-fashioning in the entire European Renaissance. More than just instructions on completing a task, the discourses penned by artists and craftsmen performed a number of cultural functions—most notably asserting that the arts were a specialized type of knowledge built on rational rules and humanist or philosophical theory rather than solely practical experience. Moreover, these publications promoted the individual artist seeking status and high-profile patronage. In the words of Biow:

> "if in the classical and medieval periods we are meant to admire the product but not the producer, in the Italian Renaissance the authors of many of these discourses about particular arts would have us admire not only the knowledge associated with the specialized work they do with such evident expertise but also *themselves* as masterful practitioners who have defined, assimilated, communicated, and at times, surpassed through their practices those very same rules discussed in their writings."[83]

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[82] Ibid., 42.

[83] Ibid., 44.

In other words, during the Cinquecento, the written word became a tool for asserting artistic prowess, decorum, social class, and an elevated status for Italian artists and craftsmen. While not every artist felt compelled to write a formal treatise regarding their practice, it was of the utmost importance to present oneself as a noble professional by writing in polished, popular scripts, just as other professionals were doing in different segments of society. Regardless of an individual's schooling or training, by the end of the sixteenth century it became much easier to instruct oneself in the art of writing in a perfect *cancelleresca*, for following the publication of Arrighi's writing manual in 1522, there were at least thirteen different calligraphic manuals published in Italy alone.[84] Based on the sheer number of writing manuals available for personal and private use in the Cinquecento, it is clear that handwriting became a more individualistic activity with a consciously aesthetic aim that one could practice and cultivate outside out of the classroom.

Whether they were spurred by the actions of their prominent Quattrocento predecessors like Michelangelo, Leonardo, and Raphael or simply reacting to trends within their profession, Florentine artists working in the Cinquecento such as Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), Jacopo Pontormo (1494-1557), and Bronzino (1503-1572) were all writing in crisp, precise *cancelleresca* scripts in their letters, personal notes, and even itemized

[84] Richardson, *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy*, 66. These include the following authors: Sigismondo Fanti, Giovanni Antonio Tagliente, Ugo da Carpi, Eutachio Celebrino, Giovanbattista Verini, Giovanbattista Palatino, Vespasiano Amphiareo, Ferdinando Ruano, Augustino da Siena, Giovan Francesco Cresci, Giulio Antonio Ercolani, Marello Scalzini, and Salvatore Gagliardelli.

lists.[85] For artists with chronically sloppy scripts, it was not uncommon to hire professional help with their personal and professional writing needs. Benvenuto Cellini, for example, was known to have hired secretaries and retained an amanuensis named Michele di Goro Vestri, to whom he dictated his entire autobiography.[86]

While there is much more archival work left to be done on the subject of artists' scripts in the Quattrocento and the Cinquecento, the aforementioned evidence makes one thing clear: the written word was a powerful tool for self-fashioning for the Renaissance artist wishing to assert the value of their artistic practice and their personal status as a noble professional. Michelangelo, Leonardo, and Raphael appear to have understood this concept well before the Cinquecento, demonstrating through yet another art form their ability to rise to the top as masters of their crafts.

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[85] Examples of Giorgio Vasari's writing can be found in Philip J. Jacks, "The Composition of Giorgio Vasari's Ricordanze: Evidence from an Unknown Draft," *Renaissance Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 742-757. For an example of Brozino's handwriting, see Carmen C. Bambach, Janet Cox-Rearick, George Goldner, et. all, *The Drawings of Bronzino* (New York; New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2010) 290. For examples of Jacopo Pontormo's writing, see selections of the artist's work housed in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence. Examples of the handwriting of other artists in the Cinquecento can be found in Elizabeth Pilliod, *Pontormo, Bronzino, Allori: A Genealogy of Florentine Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press. 2001).

[86] I would like to thank Louis Waldman for pointing this out to me. For more information on Benvenuto Cellini and his amanuensis, see Thomas Longueville, *Chisel, Pen & Poignard: or, Benvenuto Cellini His Times and His Contemporaries* (London, N.Y.: Longmans, Green. 1899), 32-33. The digital version of this book can be accessed at: http://books.google.com/books?id=HZ5KAQAAIAAJ.

Conclusion

The pen is ever bolder than the tongue.

—Michelangelo

In 1524, Clement VII and the pontifical treasury halted Michelangelo's allowance. For months, Michelangelo had been defiantly rejecting his payments and stubbornly refusing to finish the work that he had abandoned on the tomb of Pope Julius II so many years before. Now, the papacy was simply giving in to the artist's demands. Having won his battle, Michelangelo reveled in his minor victory for only a few short months before he changed his mind about the decision. Faced with what he saw as imminent poverty, Michelangelo decided to write to Giovanni Spina, an agent of the Medici bank working in Rome, to to beg for what he once refused. Michelangelo wrote, "My dear Giovanni, since the pen is ever bolder than the tongue, I write to say to you what I have often been wanting to say of recent days, and what I have not had the courage to express to you by word of mouth. May I still count on an allowance?"[87]

[87] Michelangelo Buonarroti and Gaetano Milanesi, *Le lettere di Michelangelo Buonarroti* (Firenze: 1875), 425. Milanesi's Italian transcription of this passage is as follows: "Giovanni mio caro. Perchè la penna è sempre più animosa che la lingua, vi scrivo quello che più volte a questi di non mi sono ardito per rispetto dei tempi dirvi a boca: e questo è, che visto e' tempi, come è detto, contrarii all'arte mia, non so se io m' ò da sperare più provigione…." The translation listed above can be found in Romain Rolland, *The life of Michael Angelo* (London: William Heinemenn, 1912), 65.

In a few short words, what is revealed through Michelangelo's humble plea is the power that the artist associated with the written word. It was through the written word that Michelangelo was emboldened to ask for what he could not ask for in person. The pen—not the chisel or the brush—was the tool imbued with boldness that allowed Michelangelo to assert what he did not have the courage to assert before. The written word, therefore, was an empowered surrogate for the artist himself. As this thesis has sought to demonstrate, Michelangelo's writing was a visual representative of the artist. When first encountered, his words communicated many of the same aspects of his character that would have been ascertained when meeting the artist in person for the first time. One glance at Michelangelo's script would have informed the reader of Michelangelo's noble class, his humanist education, his classical values, and his personal, elegant style. As we have seen, in some cases, it would have even communicated his wit.

Just as it was in the classical age, Michelangelo's manner of writing was indeed an aspect of his personal virtue and was a facet of his self-presentation that he maintained throughout his career. When looking at the patterns of his script, it is hard to ignore how his manner of writing reflected larger notions of Aristotelian philosophy that were pervasive in his culture. For example, in Book II of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains that virtue comes in two forms: the intellectual and the moral. Intellectual virtue, he explains, is both produced and increased by instruction and good education, and therefore requires experience and time to achieve. Moral, or ethical virtue, on the other hand, is the product of routine and habit (*ethos*). According to Aristotle, it is clear that none of the moral virtues come natural to mankind, for no natural property can be altered by habit;

rather, nature gives us the capacity to receive the virtues, and this capacity is brought to maturity by habit and practice alone.[88] Virtue, he explains, is a disposition, and our moral dispositions are formed as the direct result of our activities. Aristotle concludes that "virtue, like art, is constantly dealing with what is harder, since the harder the task the better the success."[89]

Through his constant, perfect writing, it seems that Michelangelo had achieved Aristotle's definition of intellectual and moral virtue. Writing in the *cancelleresca* was certainly not an ability or task that came naturally to Michelangelo; rather, it was the product of practiced habit and rigorous routine. Both noble and beautiful, Michelangelo's script was in fact a reflection of his constant desire to achieve ideal beauty in every medium. Furthermore, his manner of writing was an aspect of his personal and professional life that helped him achieve success and assert his status as a nobleman rather than simply a craftsman—a professional among professionals.

This thesis has barely scratched the surface of what appears to be a significant phenomenon among artists working during the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento. At a time when artists and their professions were gaining status, the written word was a persuasive and forceful tool for asserting their place among the educated elite and demonstrating their virtue. While only a handful of other artists and their scripts have been

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[88] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 73. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 71. See Book II, lines 1-3. Accessed at https://www.loebclassics.com/view/aristotle-nicomachean_ethics/1926/pb_LCL073.71.xml?result=1&rskey=hTXU1b.

[89] Ibid., 83.

explored in this discussion, it is my hope that more art historians will turn their attention to the art of words during the Quattrocento and the Cinquecento and to the narratives running below the written text of their subjects. In the words of Rosand and Highsmith, a word is like a drawing and there is indeed meaning in the mark.

Figures

Figure 1.1. Detail of the *gothic quadrata* script from the Metz Pontifical, c. 1300. Image Credit: Stan Knight, *Historical Scripts: From Classical Times to the Renaissance,* 65.

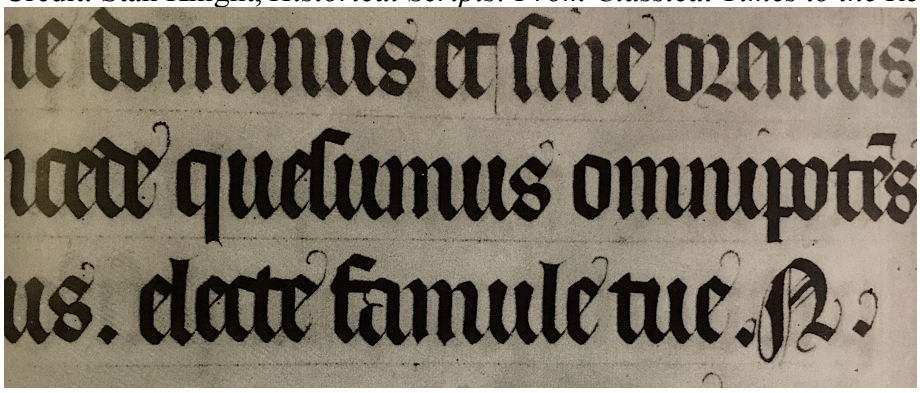


Figure 1.2. Detail of Petrarch's autograph *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* written in his "littera fere-humanistica", c. 1370. Image Credit: Stephen Herold, Gay Walker, and Stanly Morison, *The Origins, Glory & Decline of Humanist Cursive in Italy 1400-1650*, 61.

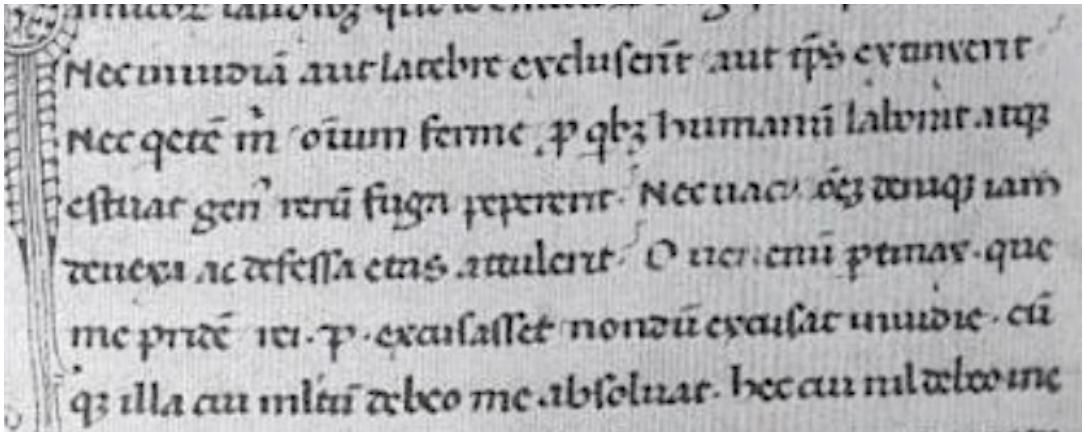


Figure 1.3. Detail of the standardized *mercantesca* printed in Giovanni Antonio Tagliente's *Lo presente libro Insegna*, 1530. Image Credit: Ludovico Arrighi, Giovanni Antonio Tagliente, and Giovanni Battista Palatino, *Three Classics of Italian Calligraphy,* 78.

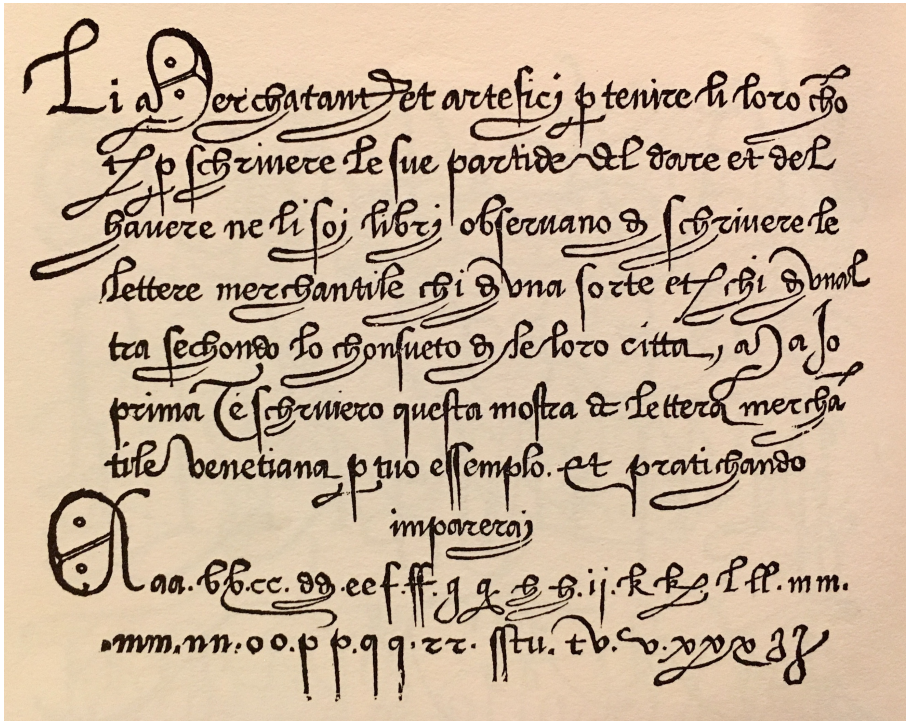


Figure 1.4. Detail of a page of Niccoli's Cicero *De Oratore* written in his "littera antica" or "lettera anticha formata", c. 1405-1415. Florence, Bibl. Laur., Plut. 50.146, fol. 17r. Image Credit: Stephen Herold, Gay Walker, and Stanly Morison, *The Origins, Glory & Decline of Humanist Cursive in Italy 1400-1650*, 68.

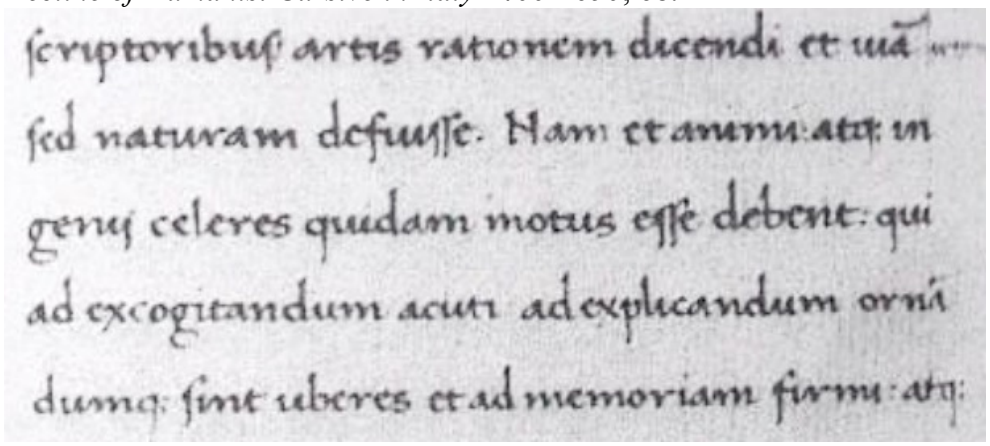


Figure 1.5. Niccolò Niccoli, detail from Niccoli's copy of Ammianus Marcellinus written in the *cancelleresca*. Image Credit: Alfred Fairbank and Berthold Wolpe, *Renaissance Handwriting: An Anthology of Italic Scripts,* plate 2c.

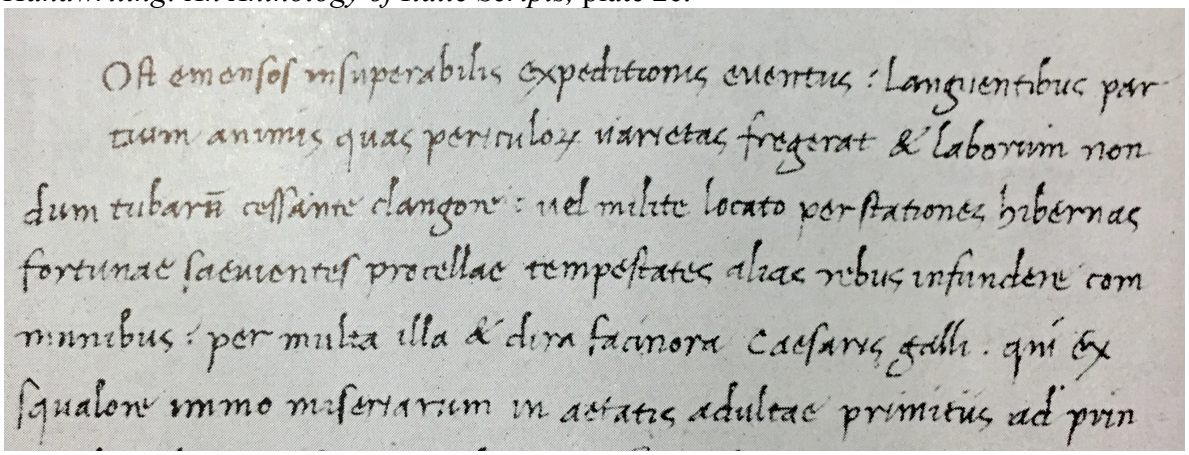


Figure 2.1. Michelangelo Buonarroti, detail from an autograph letter, 11 July 1496. Image Credit: Medici Archive Project, Florence, Italy.

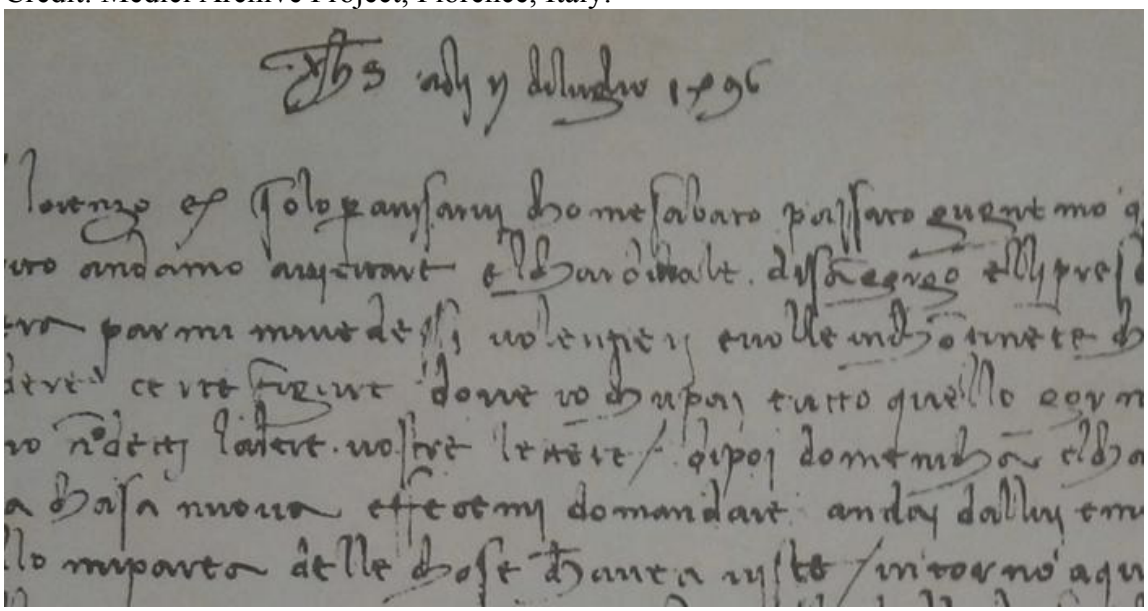


Figure 2.2. Michelangelo Buonarroti, detail from the draft of a contract regarding the Piccolomini Altar in Siena, 22 May 1501. Archivio Buonarroti, II-III, 3r. Image Credit: Leonard Barkan, *Michelangelo: A Life on Paper*, 39.

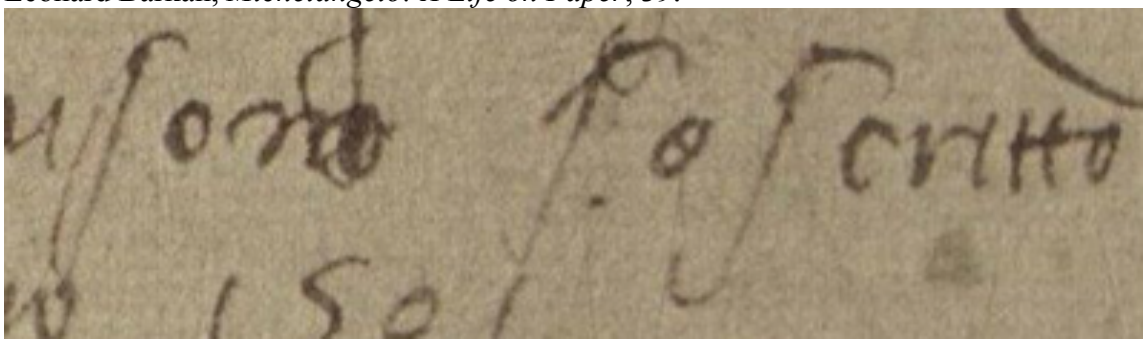


Figure 2.3. Michelangelo Buonarroti, detail from the draft of a contract regarding the Piccolomini Altar in Siena, May 22, 1501. Archivio Buonarroti, II-III, 3r. Image Credit: Leonard Barkan, *Michelangelo: A Life on Paper*, 39.

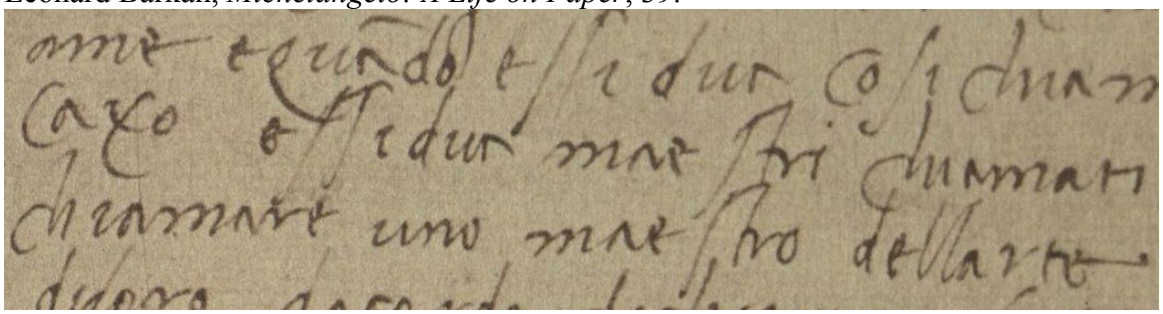


Figure 2.4. Michelangelo Buonarroti, detail of script from his poem and sketch, c. 1508-1512. Archivio Buonarroti, XIII, n. 111. Image Credit: Leonard Barkan, *Michelangelo: A Life on Paper*, 86.

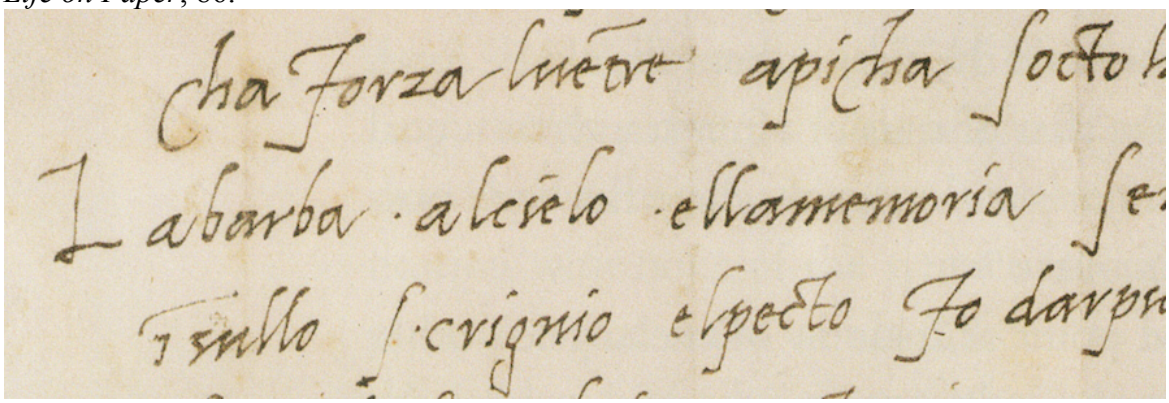


Figure 2.5. Ludovico degli Arrighi, page from *La Operina*, c. 1522. Image Credit: Ludovico Arrighi, Giovanni Antonio Tagliente, and Giovanni Battista Palatino, *Three classics of Italian Calligraphy,* 8.

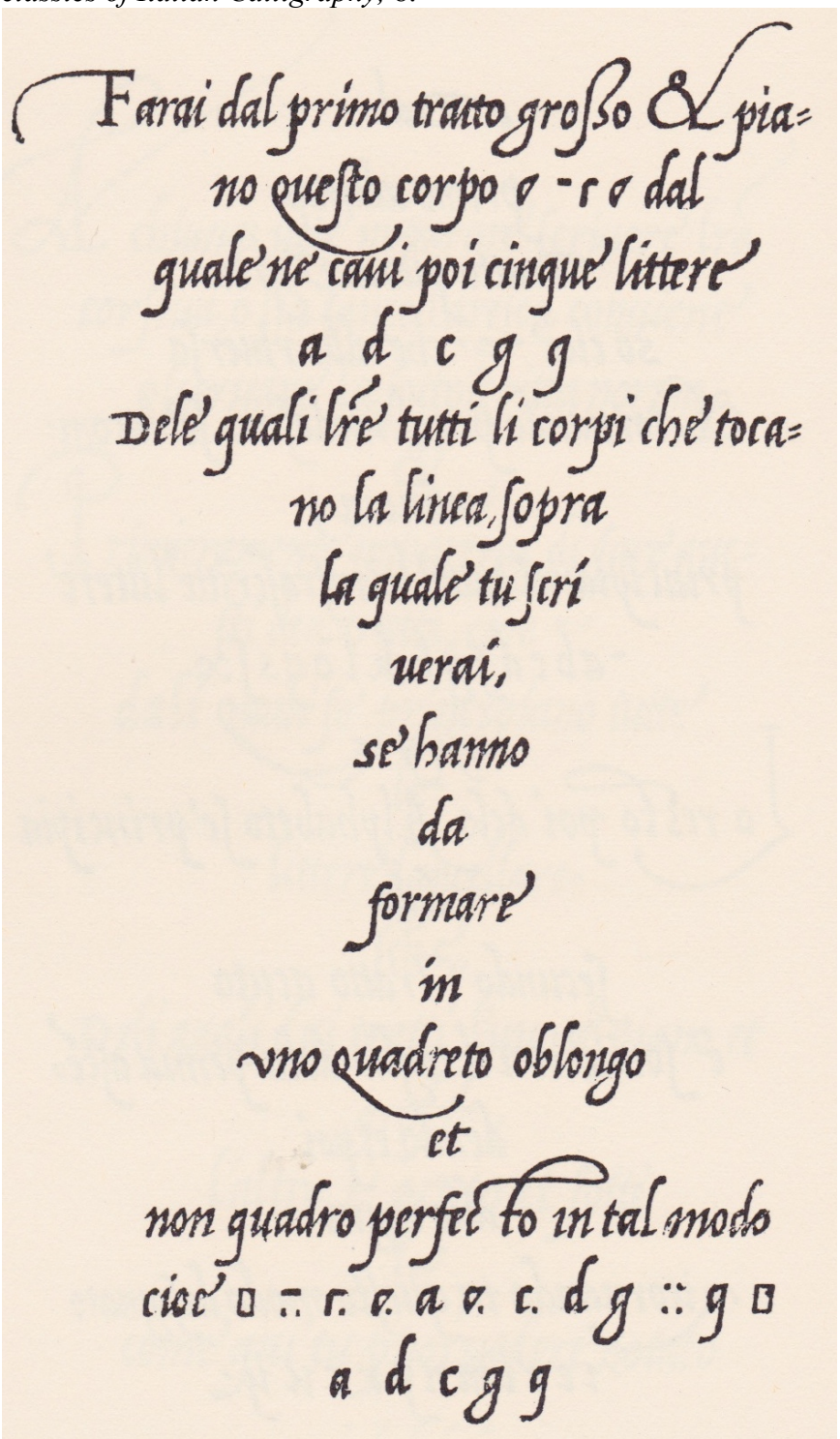


Figure 2.6. Michelangelo Buonarroti, madrigal written on blue paper, 1525-1544, Archivio Buonarroti, XIII, n. 46. Image Credit: Lucillia Bardeschi Ciulich, *Costanza ed evoluzione nella scrittura di Michelangelo*, 53.

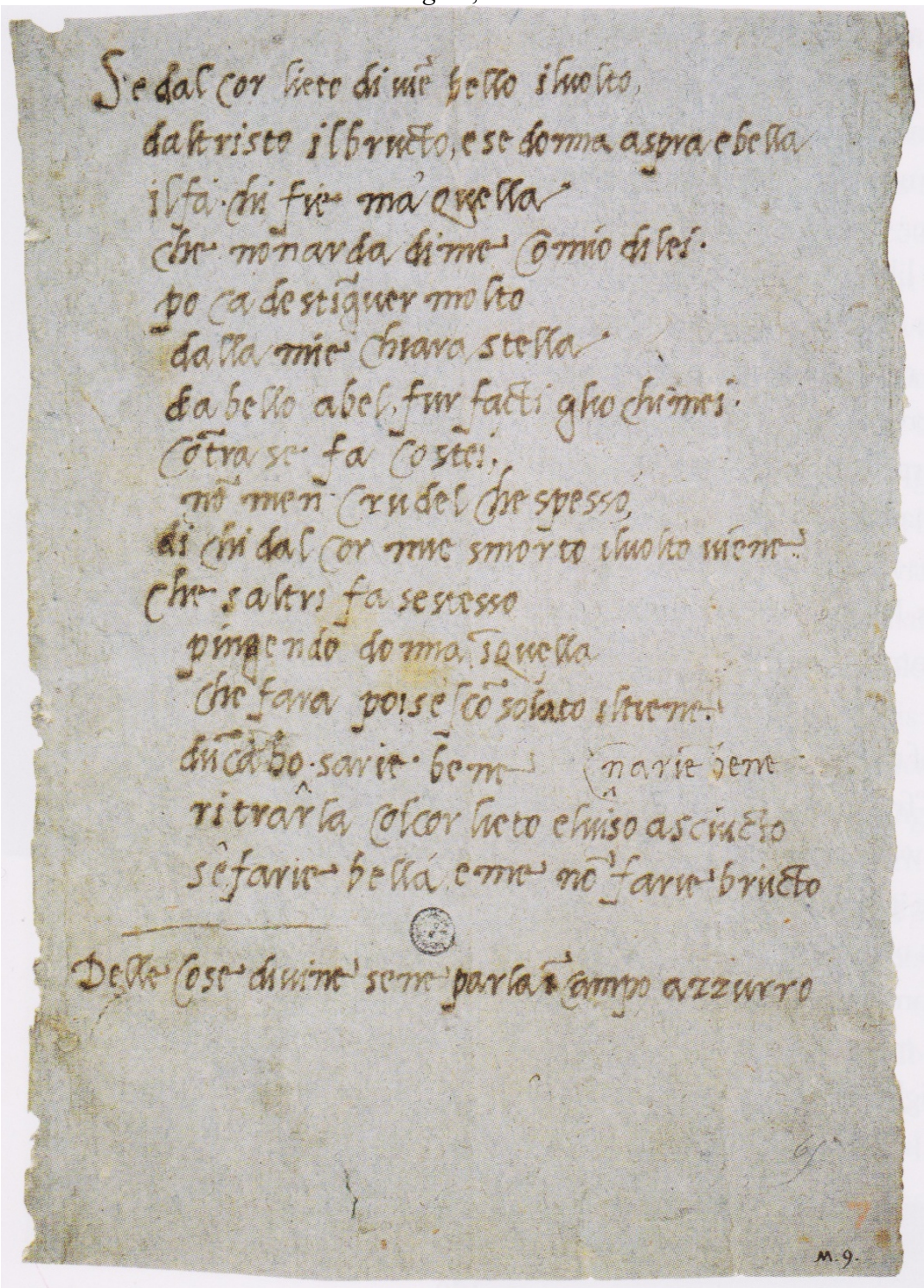


Figure 3.1. Luca della Robbia, detail from *catasto* of 1451. Archivio centrale di Stato di Firenze. Image Credit: Carlo Pini, *La Scrittura di Artisti Italiani. (Sec. XIV-XVII)*. Vol. 3. Firenze: Presso l'editore, 1869.

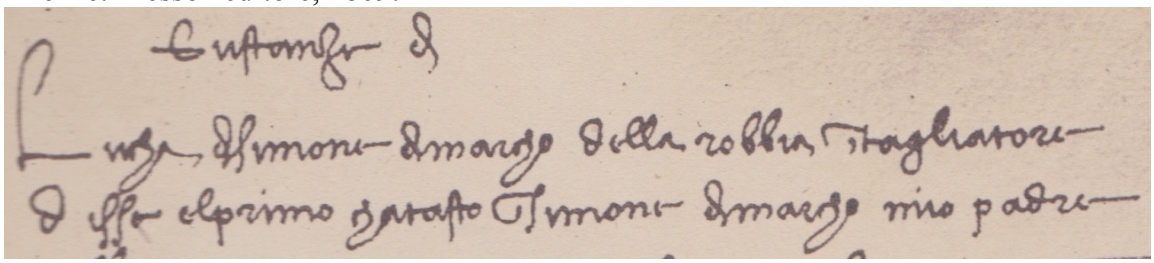


Figure 3.2. Andrea del Verrocchio, detail from *catasto* of 1481. Archivio centrale di Stato in Firenze. Image Credit: Carolo Pini *La Scrittura di Artisti Italiani. (Sec. XIV-XVII)*. Vol. 3. Firenze: Presso l'editore, 1869.

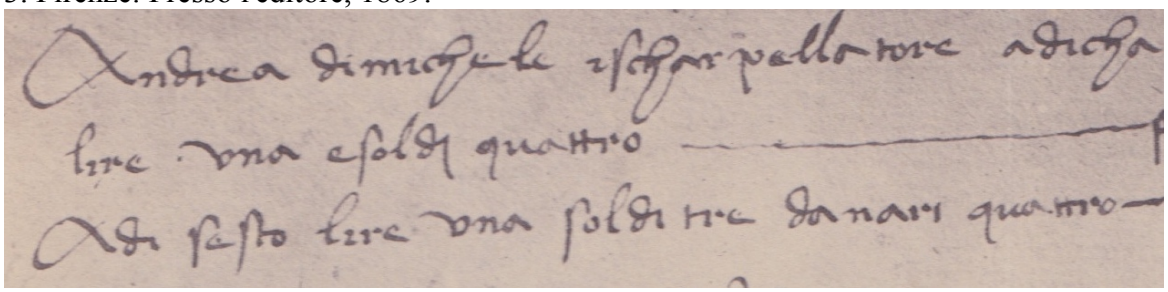


Figure 3.3. Benozzo Gozzoli, detail from autograph letter, 10 July 1459. Archivio centrale di stato di Firenze, Carteggio privato de' Medici, Filza 17. Image Credit: Carolo Pini *La Scrittura di Artisti Italiani. (Sec. XIV-XVII)*. Vol. 3. Firenze: Presso l'editore, 1869.

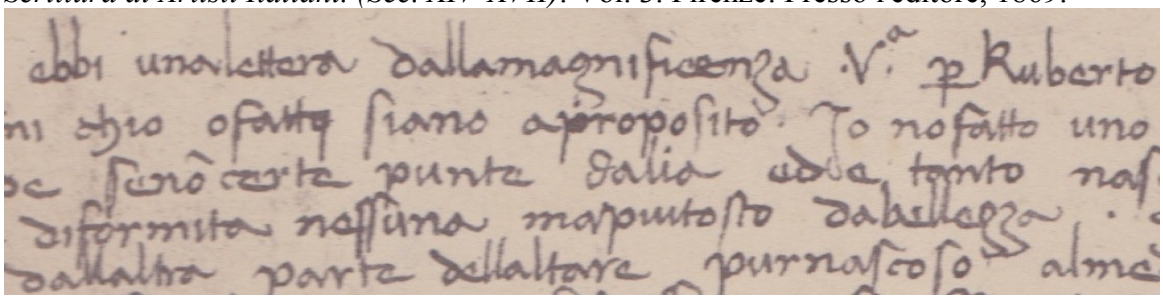


Figure 3.4. Bertoldo di Giovanni, detail from a letter from Bertoldo to Lorenzo il Magnifico. Archivio centrale di Stato in Firenze, Carteggio privato de' Medici, Filza 37, carte 594. Image Credit: Carolo Pini *La Scrittura di Artisti Italiani. (Sec. XIV-XVII)*. Vol. 3. Firenze: Presso l'editore, 1869.

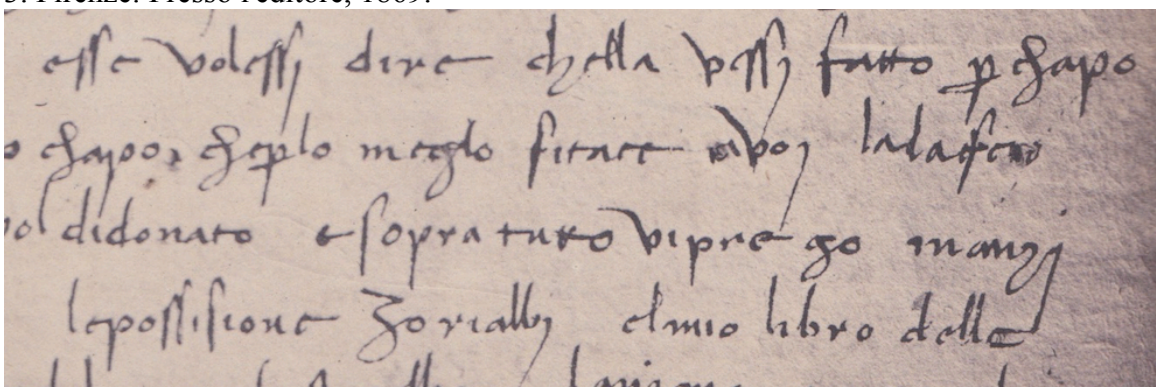


Figure 3.5. Leonardo da Vinci, detail of the inscription in Leonardo's sketch, *View of the Arno Valley*, 5 August 1473. Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Florence, no. 8P. Image Credit: ArtStor.

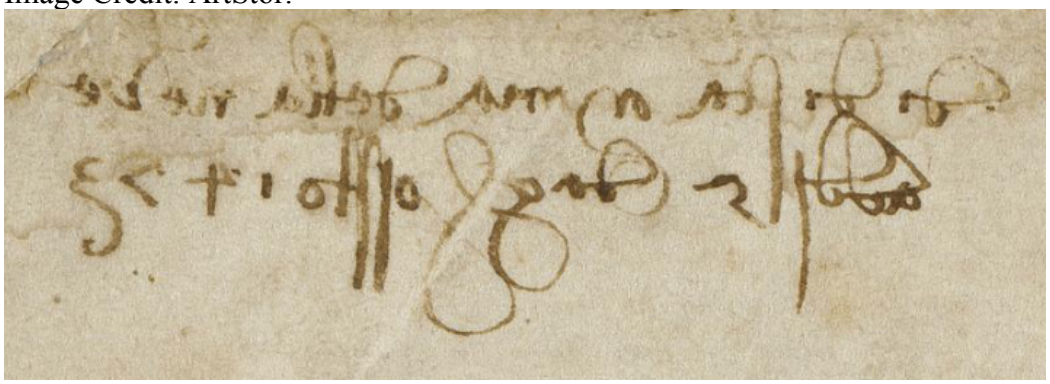


Figure 3.6. Leonardo da Vinci, detail of the inscription from Leonardo's sketch (reversed for legibility), Studies of Heads and Machines, 1478. Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Florence, no. 446E. Image Credit: ArtStor.

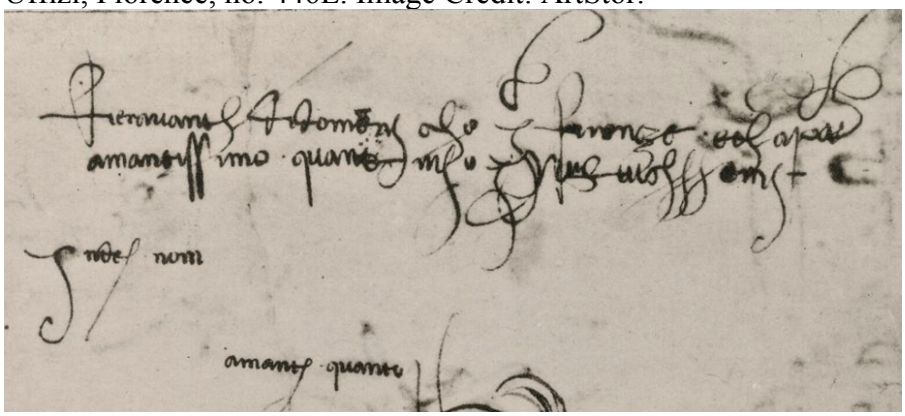


Figure 3.7. Leonardo da Vinci, Studies of Heads and Machines, 1478. Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Florence, no. 446E. Image Credit: ArtStor.

Figure 3.8. Leonardo da Vinci, detail of folio 18 of the *Codex Trivulzianus,* c. 1487-1490. Image Credit: Raymond S. Stites, *The Sublimations of Leonardo da Vinci with a Translation of the Codex Trivulzianus*, 214.

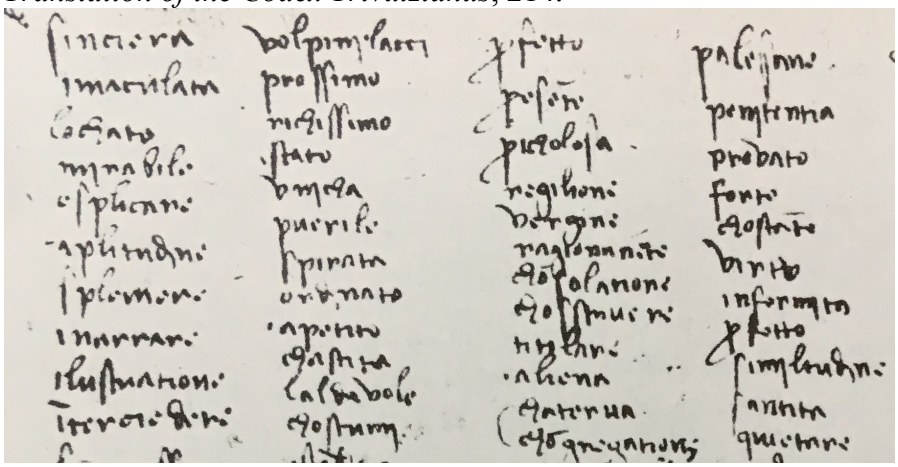


Figure 3.9. Leonardo da Vinci, detail of script from a study regarding a lathe for grinding burning mirrors, after 1490. London, The British Library, Codex Arundel, fols. 84v and 88r. Image Credit: Leonardo, Pietro C. Marani, and Maria Teresa Fiorio, *Leonardo da Vinci, 1452-1519: The Design of the World,* 265.

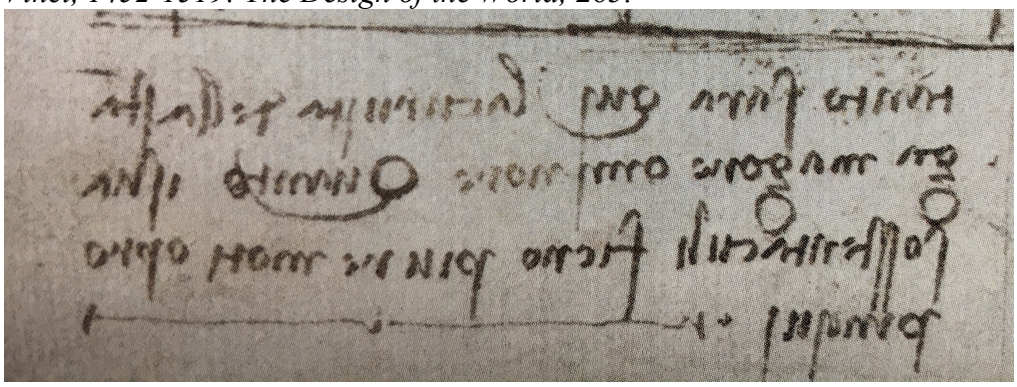


Figure 3.10. Leonardo da Vinci, detail of the script from Leonardo's *Vitruvian Man,* c. 1490. Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Gabinetto dei Disegni e Stampe, inv. 228. Image Credit: DASE.laits.utexas.edu.

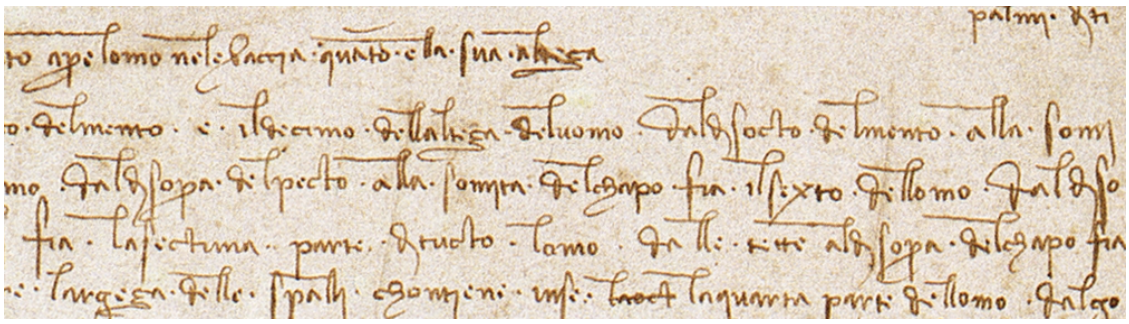


Figure 3.11. Raphael, detail of Raphael's letter to Simone Ciarla, 21 April 1508. Biblioteca Apostiolica Vaticana, MS Borgiano latino 800. Image Credit: John Shearman, *Raphael in Early Modern Sources (1483-1602),* Fig. 3.

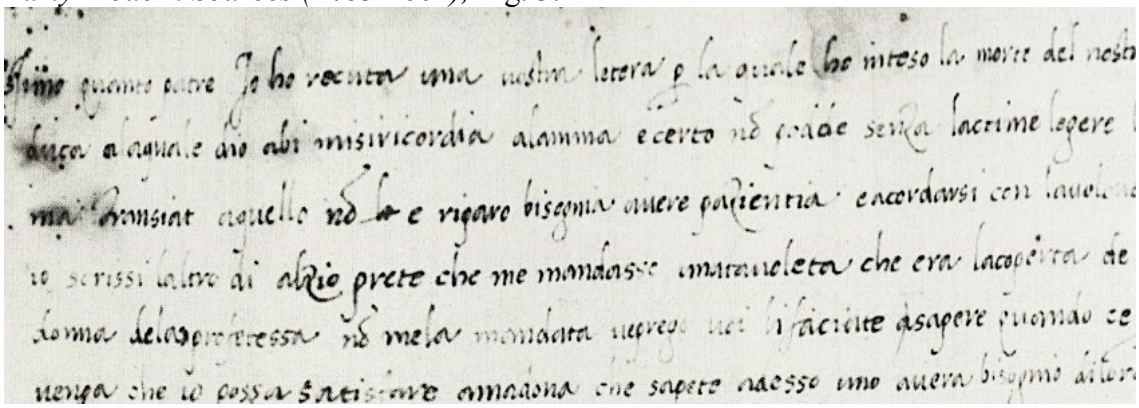


Figure 3.12. Raphael, detail from Raphael's sonnet *Li è un pensier dolce* (IIIb). London, British Museum, Prints and Drawings (F.f. 1-35). Image Credit: British Museum and John Shearman, *Raphael in Early Modern Sources (1483-1602)*, Fig. 10.

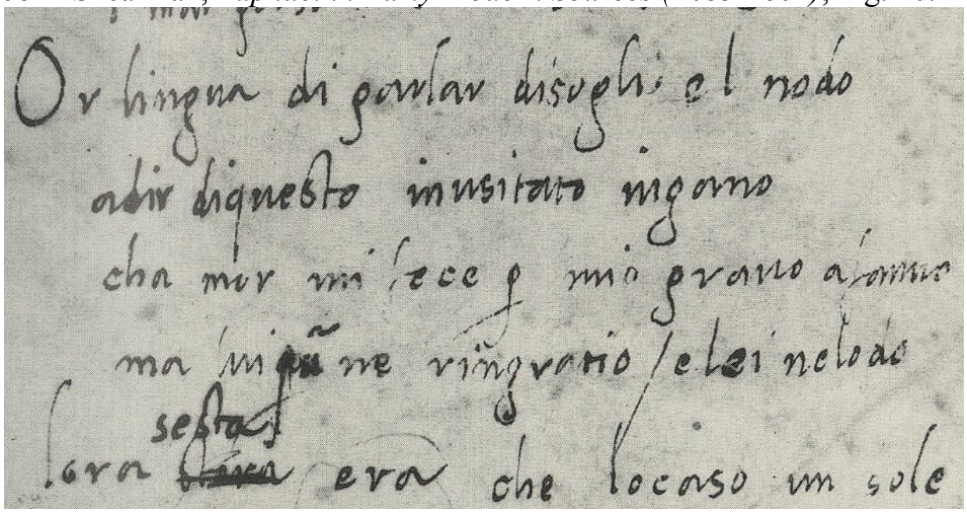


Figure 3.13. Raphael, detail of Raphael's draft of agreement between Francesco di Domenico Bonello and Giuliano Leno, 2 August 1514. Los Angeles, UCLA, Elmer Belt Library, MS 68. Image Credit: Elmer Belt Library of Vinciana, UCLA and John Shearman, *Raphael in Early Modern Sources (1483-1602),* Fig. 36.

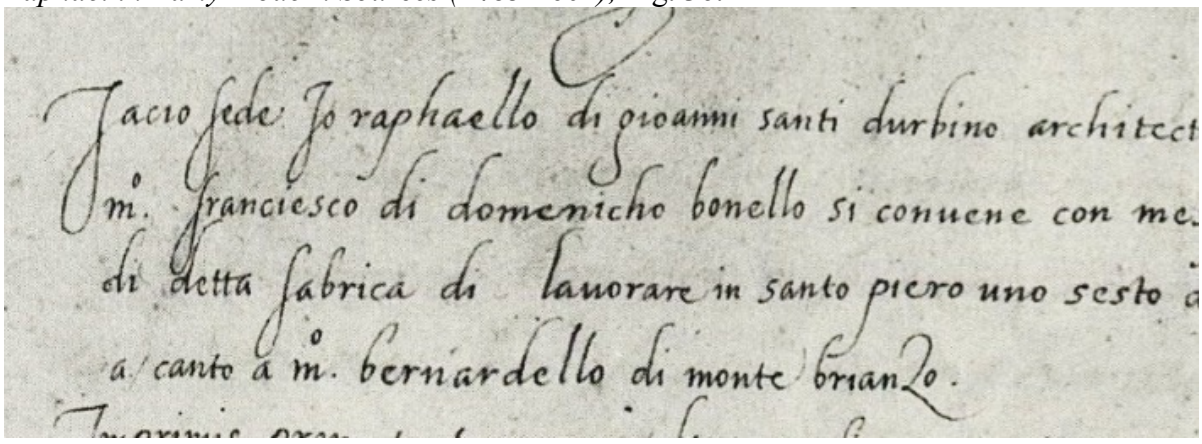
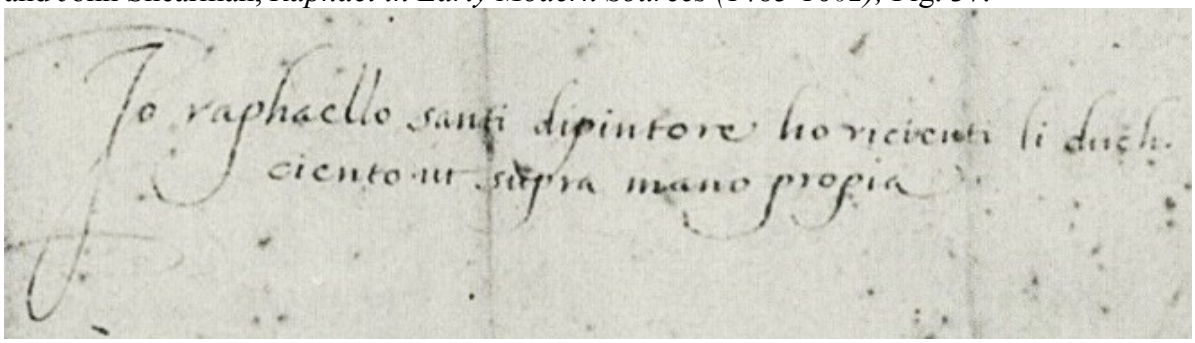


Figure 3.14. Raphael, detail of the *Madato camerale* in favor of Raphael, 1 June 1518. Cambridge, MA, Houghton Library, MS. Typ. 466 (3). Image Credit: Houghton Library and John Shearman, *Raphael in Early Modern Sources (1483-1602),* Fig. 37.



Appendix

Table A1 is an original table comparing letter forms penned by Michelangelo each decade set against standardized scripts printed in early writing manuals published by Giovanni Battista Palatino (1515-1575) and Ludovico Vicentino degli Arrighi (1475-1527). Each column represents an alphabet of letters isolated from ten different selections of writing firmly attributed to Michelangelo's hand. To demonstrate Michelangelo's consistency across genres of writing, there are a variety of different texts appearing in the table. These texts include: an autograph letter written by Michelangelo in Rome to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici (1496), a letter to his father, Ludovico di Leonardo Buonarroti Simoni (1497), an unsent draft of a contract regarding the Piccolomini Altar in Siena on scratch paper including figure drawings and sketches (May 22,1501), a poem and corresponding sketch of the artist painting the Sistine Ceiling (1508-12), A *quietanza* (receipt) regarding work at San Lorenzo (1517), a letter to Michelangelo's close friend and chaplain of the Florentine Cathedral, Giovanfrancesco Fattucci (1522-23), the draft of a letter written in Rome to Tommaso Cavalieri (1533), a letter containing four epitaphs in honor or Cecchino Bracci sent to Luigi del Riccio (1544), a letter to Michelangelo's colleague, Giorgio Vasari (1544), and finally, a letter written in Rome to Michelangelo's nephew Lionardo (August 21, 1563). Due to the sheer size of the complete collection of Michelangelo's correspondence, the goal of this study was not to create a truly comprehensive chart of the artist's letter forms over his 88-year life. Rather, this figure aims to represent each major epoch of Michelangelo's career, condensing a lifetime of script into a single, digestible image.

Table A1. Original table comparing Michelangelo's handwriting from 1496-1563

**Images and transcriptions of the following figures from the table are provided below:

Figure A2. Michelangelo, letter to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, July 11, 1496.
Figure A3. Michelangelo, letter to his father, Ludovico, July 1, 1497.
Figure A4/5. Michelangelo, draft of a contract regarding the Piccolomini Altar, May 22, 1501.
Figure A6. Michelangelo, sonnet and sketch written in Rome, 1508-1512.
Figure A7. Michelangelo, *quietanza* for work done on San Lorenzo, 1517.
Figure A8. Michelangelo, letter to Giovanfrancesco Fattucci, 1522-23.
Figure A9. Michelangelo, draft of a letter to Tommaso Cavalieri, January 1, 1533.
Figure A10. Michelangelo, four epitaphs sent to Luigi del Riccio, 1544.
Figure A11. Michelangelo, letter to Giorgio Vasari, July 1, 1557.
Figure A12. Michelangelo, letter written to nephew Lionardo, August 21, 1563.

Figure A2. Michelangelo Buonarroti, autograph letter dated July 11, 1496. Image Credit: Medici Archive Project.

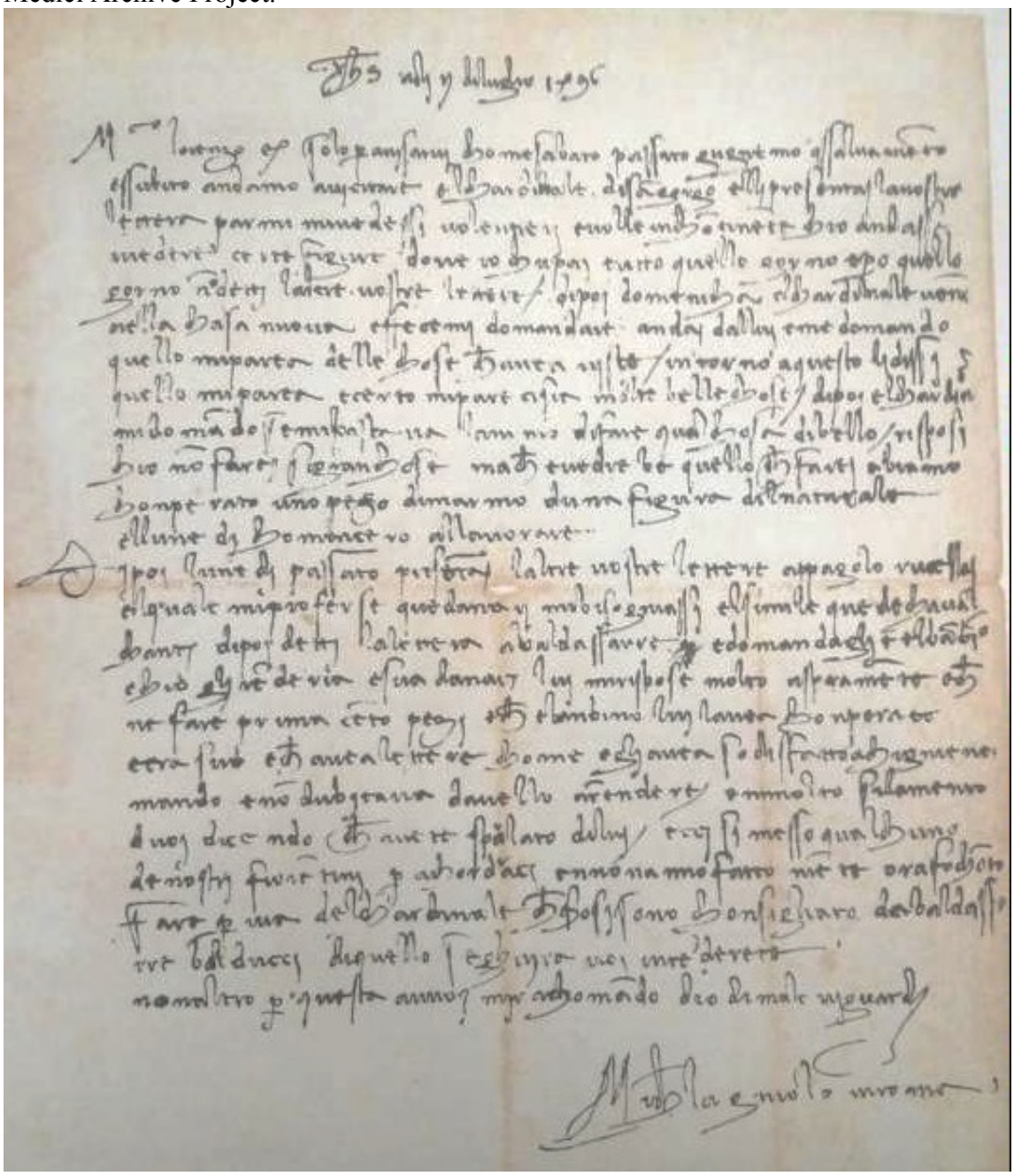


Figure A3. Michelangelo Buonarroti, autograph letter, 1 July 1497. Archivio Buonarroti, IV, n. 1. Image Credit: Lucillia Bardeschi Ciulich, *Costanza ed evoluzione nella scrittura di Michelangelo,* 19.

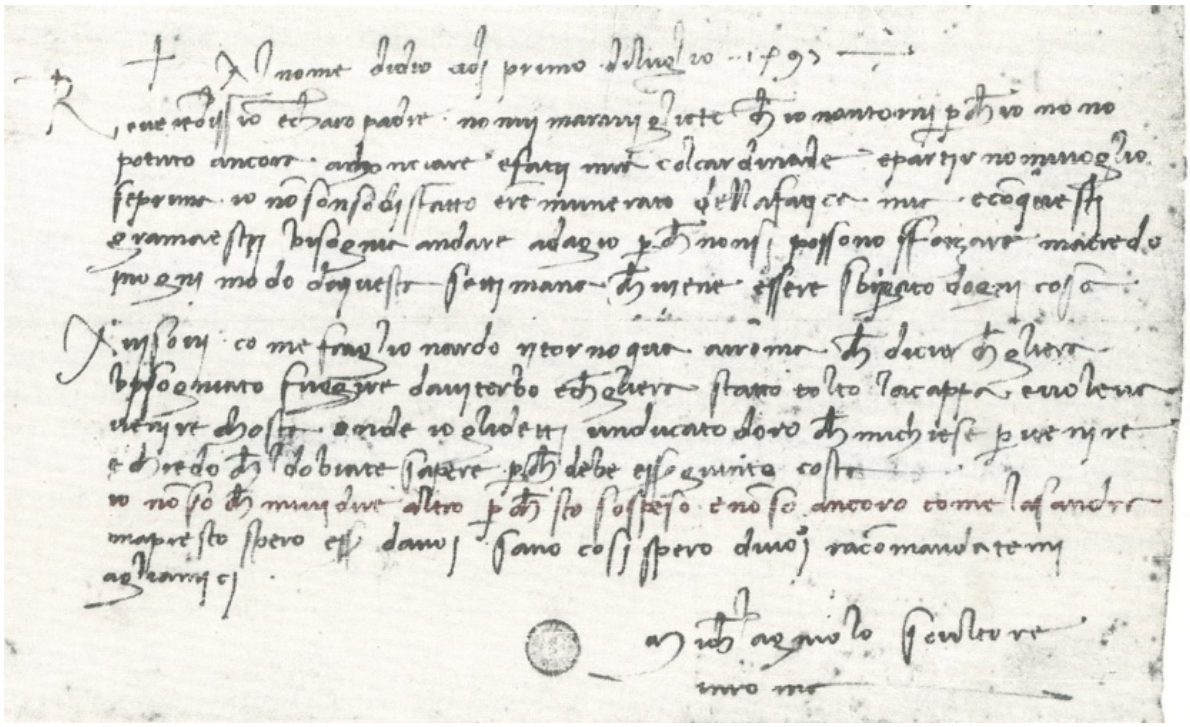


Figure A4. Michelangelo, draft of a contract regarding the Piccolomini Altar in Siena, 22 May 1501. Archivio Buonarroti, II-III, 3r. Florence, Italy. Image Credit: Leonard Barkan, *Michelangelo: A Life on Paper*, 39.

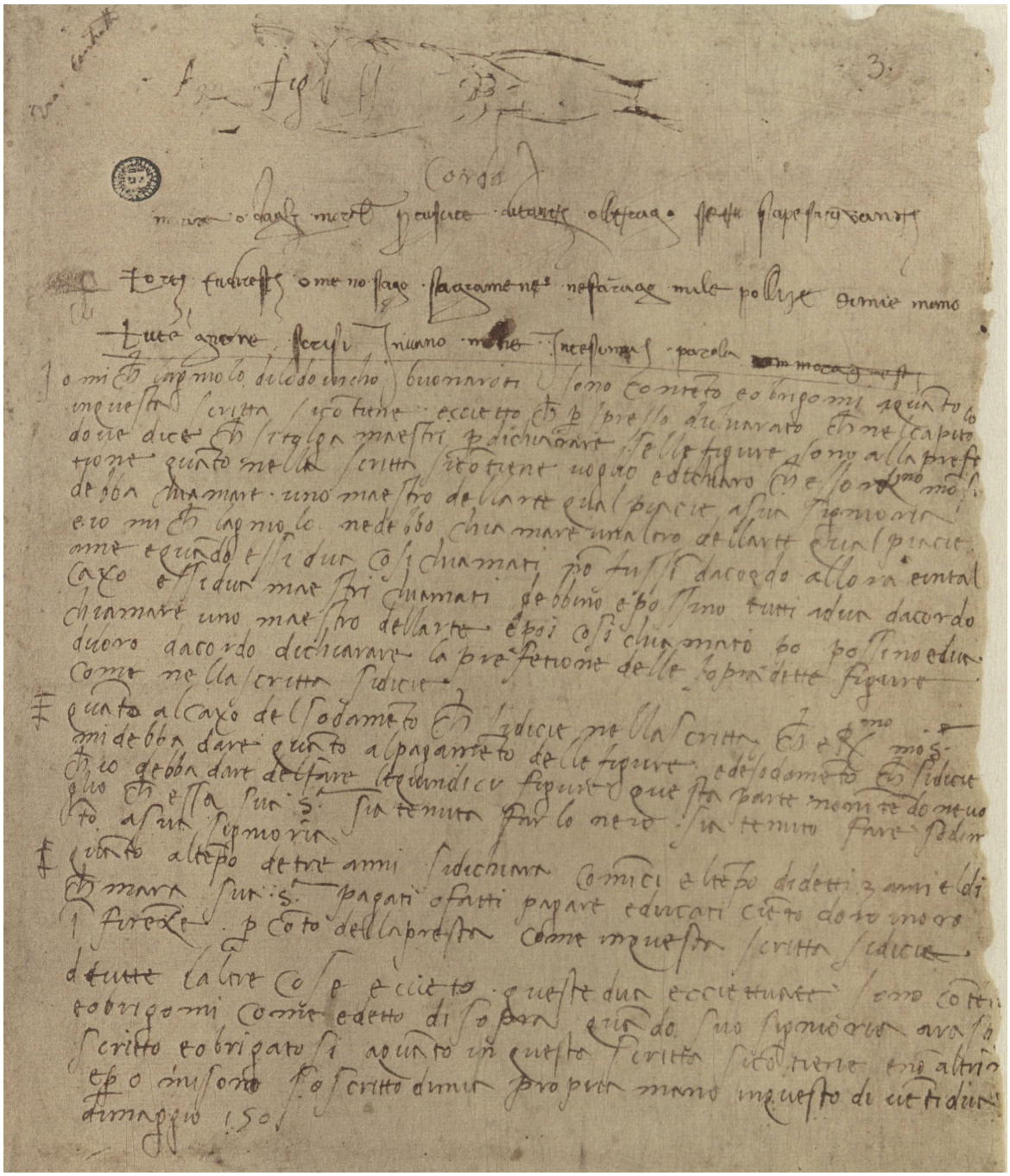


Figure A5. Michelangelo, draft of a contract regarding the Piccolomini Altar in Siena, 22 May 1501. Archivio Buonarroti, II-III, 3v. Florence, Italy. Image Credit: Leonard Barkan, *Michelangelo: A Life on Paper*, 40.

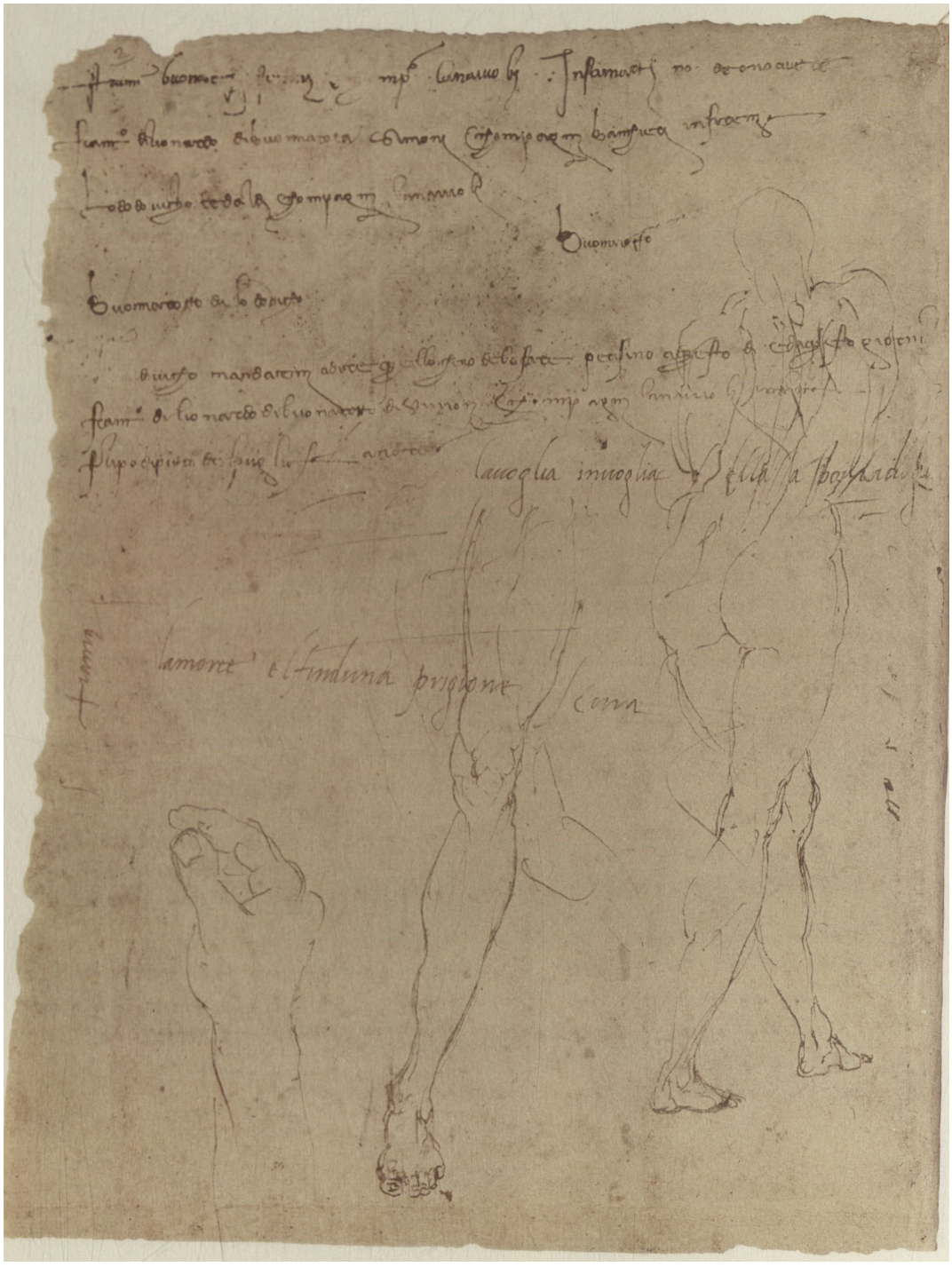


Figure A6. Michelangelo Buonarroti, sonnet and sketch written in Rome, 1508-1512. Archivio Buonarroti, XIII, n. 111. Image Credit: Leonard Barkan, *Michelangelo: A Life on Paper*, 86.

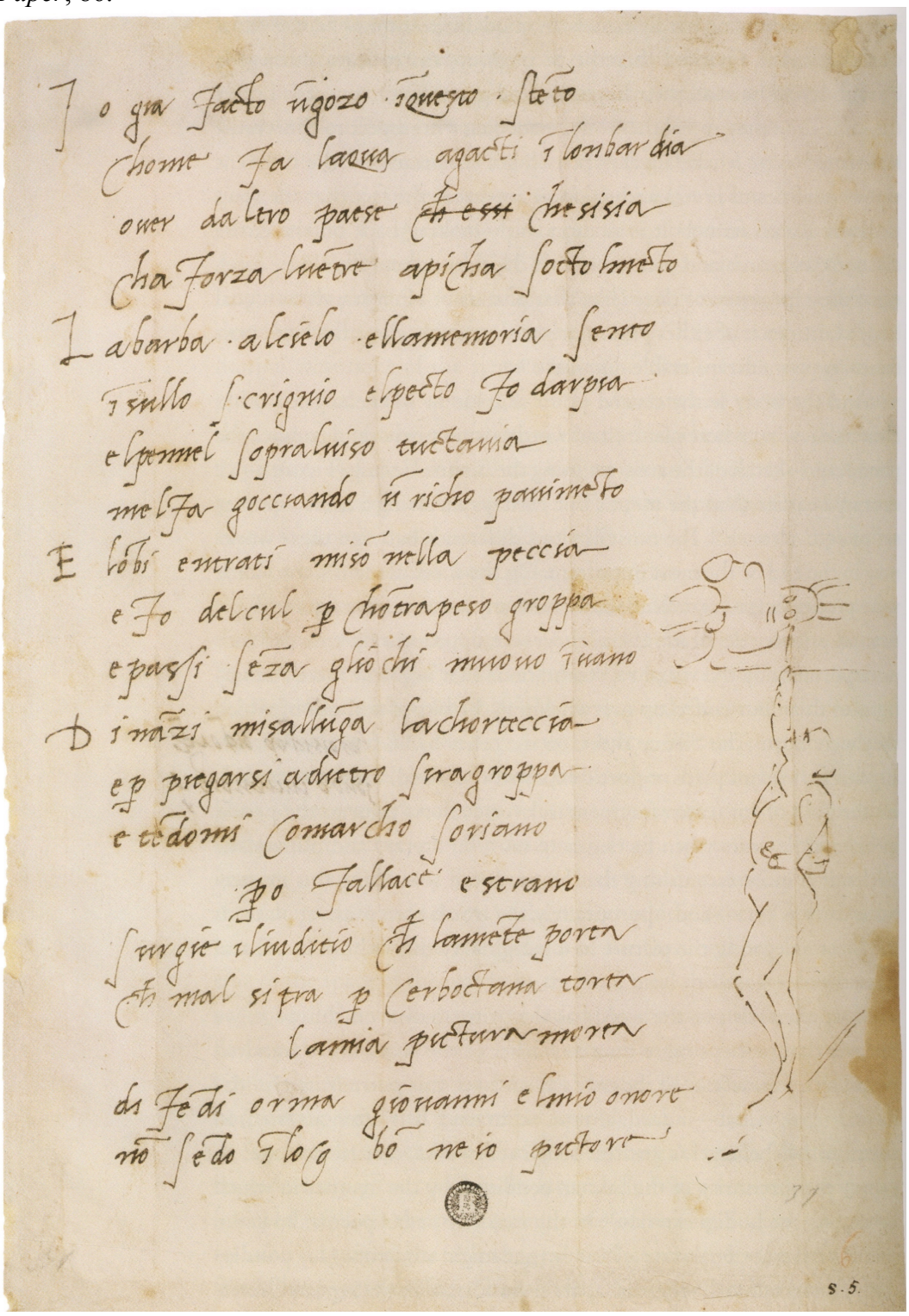


Figure A7. Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Quietanza*, 1517. Image Credit: Medici Archive Project, Florence, Italy.

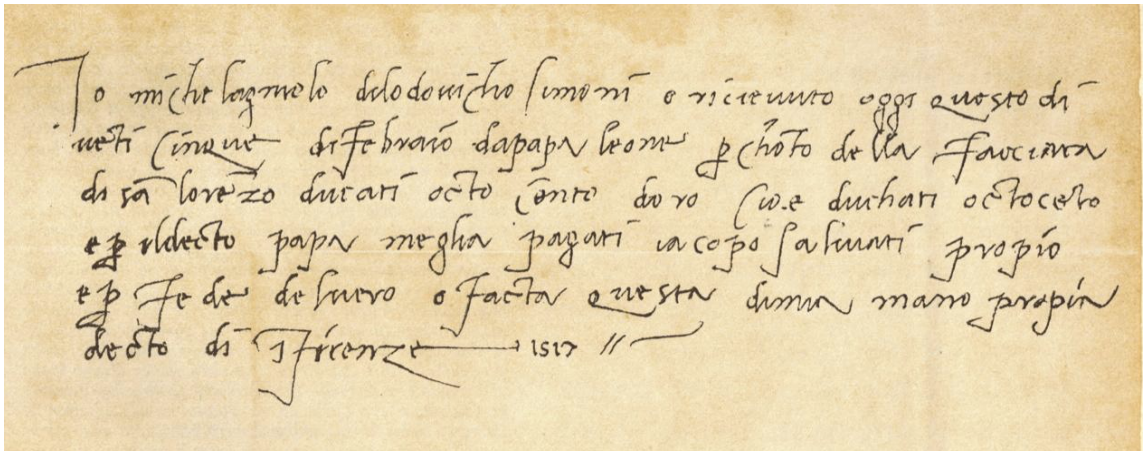


Figure A8. Michelangelo Buonarroti, letter written to Giovanfrancesco Fattucci in Florence, 1522-1523. Archivio Buonarroti, V, n. 33. Image Credit: Lucillia Bardeschi Ciulich, *Costanza ed evoluzione nella scrittura di Michelangelo,* 38.

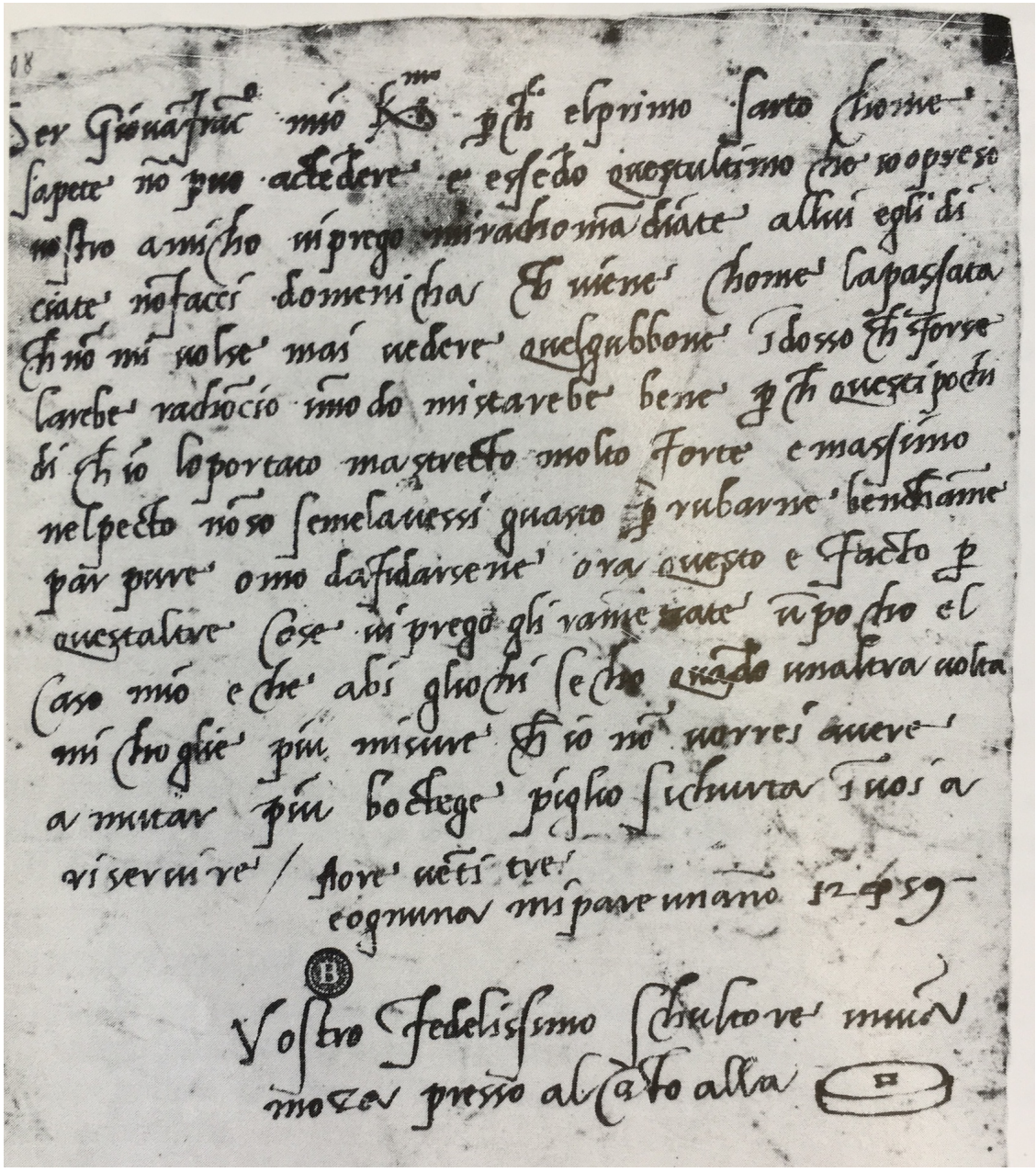


Figure A9. Michelangelo Buonarroti, draft of a letter written to Tommaso Cavalieri in Rome, 1 January 1533. Archivio Buonarroti, V, n. 62. Image Credit: Lucillia Bardeschi Ciulich, *Costanza ed evoluzione nella scrittura di Michelangelo,* 52.

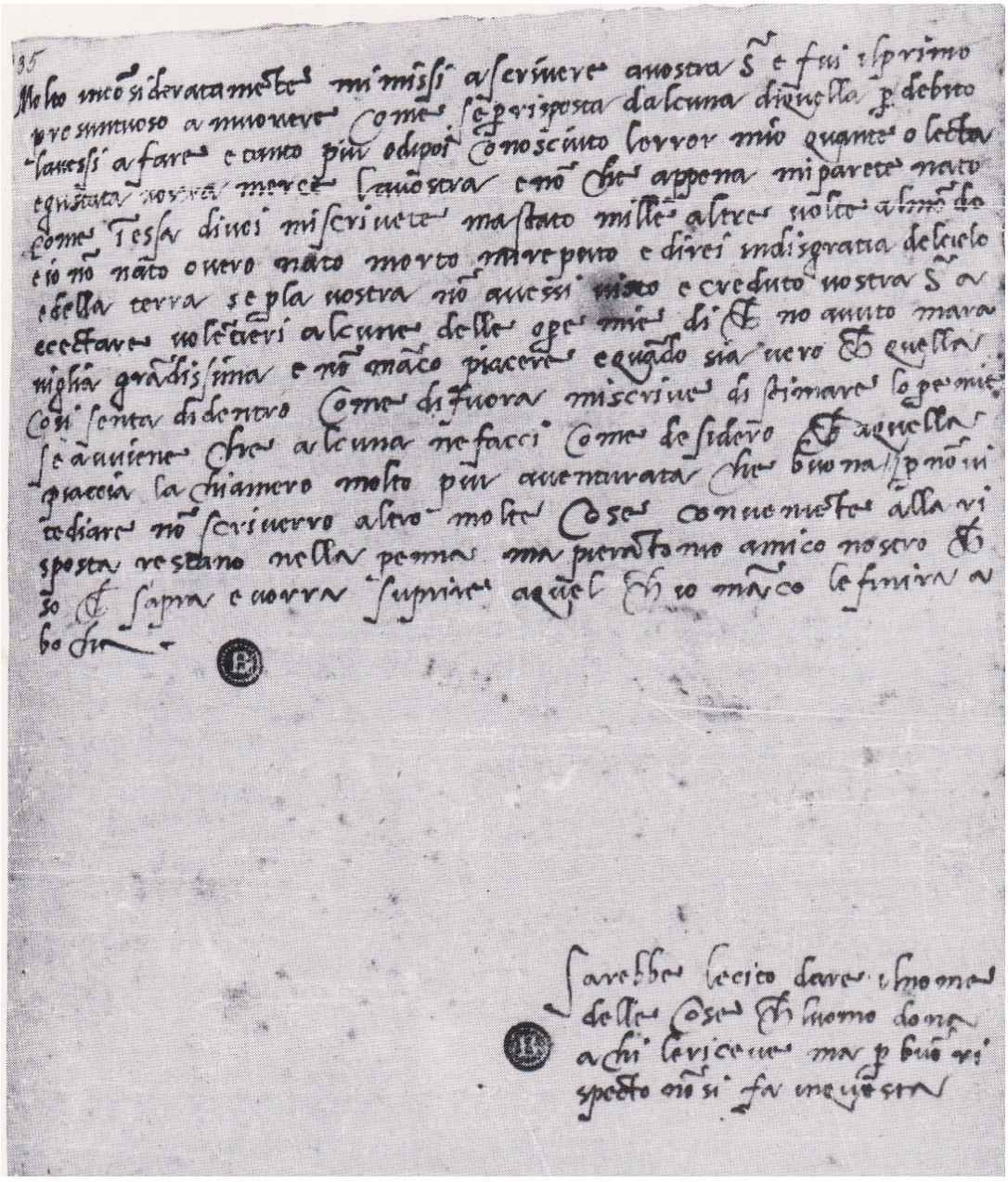


Figure A10. Michelangelo Buonarroti, four epitaphs in honor or Cecchino Bracci sent to Luigi del Riccio, 1544, Archivio Buonarroti, XIII, n. 33. Image Credit: Leonard Barkan, *Michelangelo: A Life on Paper*, 78.

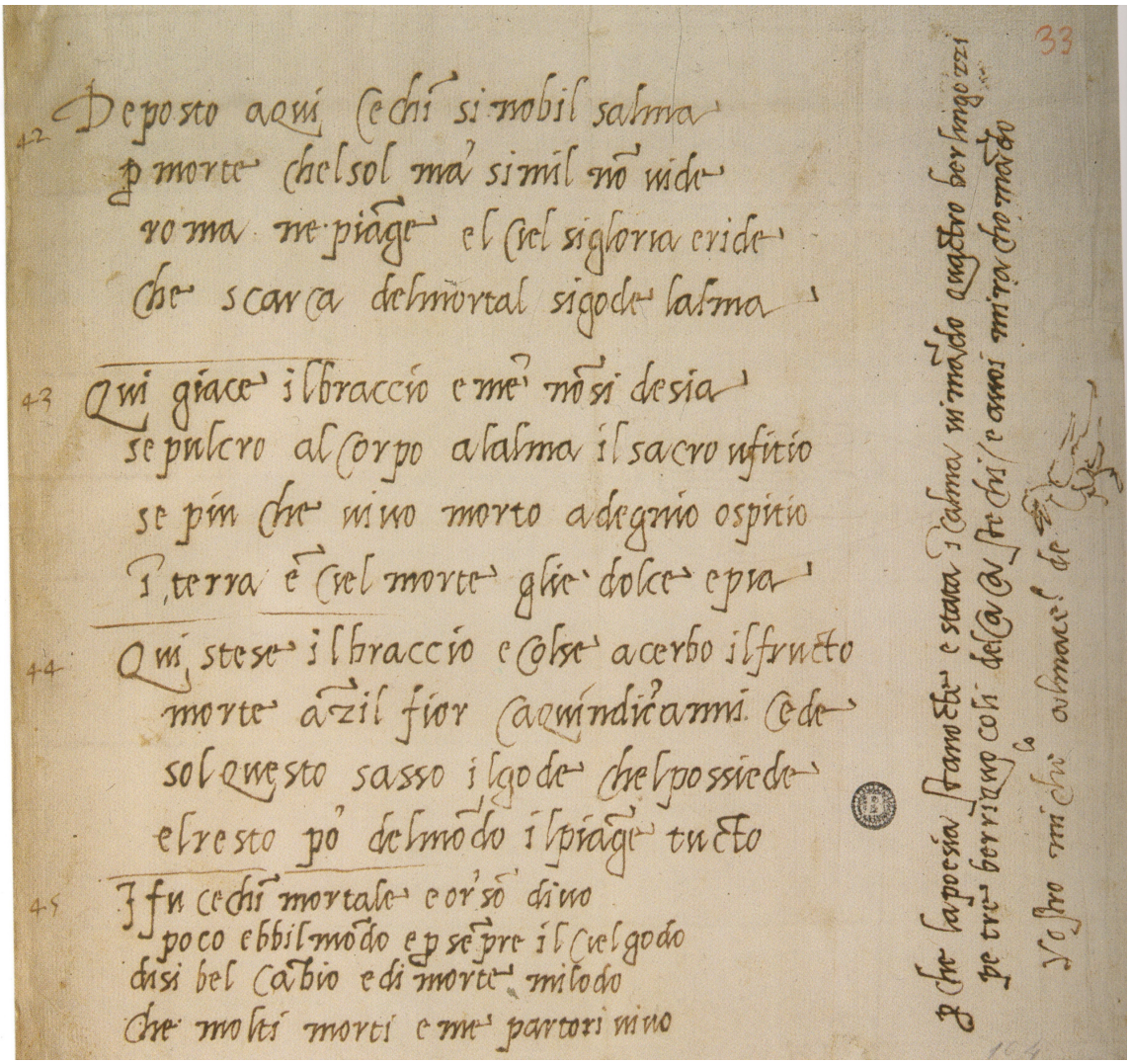


Figure A11. Michelangelo Buonarroti, detail of a letter from Michelangelo in Rome to Giorgio Vasari in Florence, 1 July 1557. Arezzo, Archivio Vasari, 12, c. 22. Image Credit: Lucillia Bardeschi Ciulich, *Costanza ed evoluzione nella scrittura di Michelangelo,* 71.

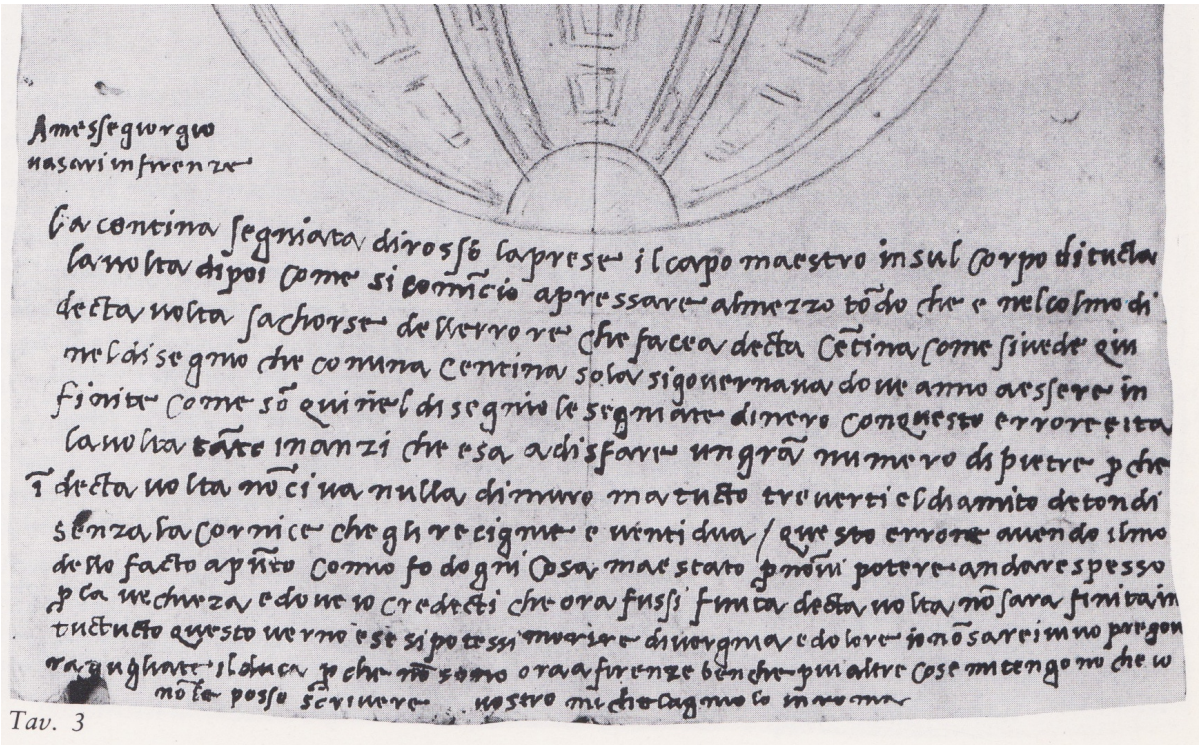


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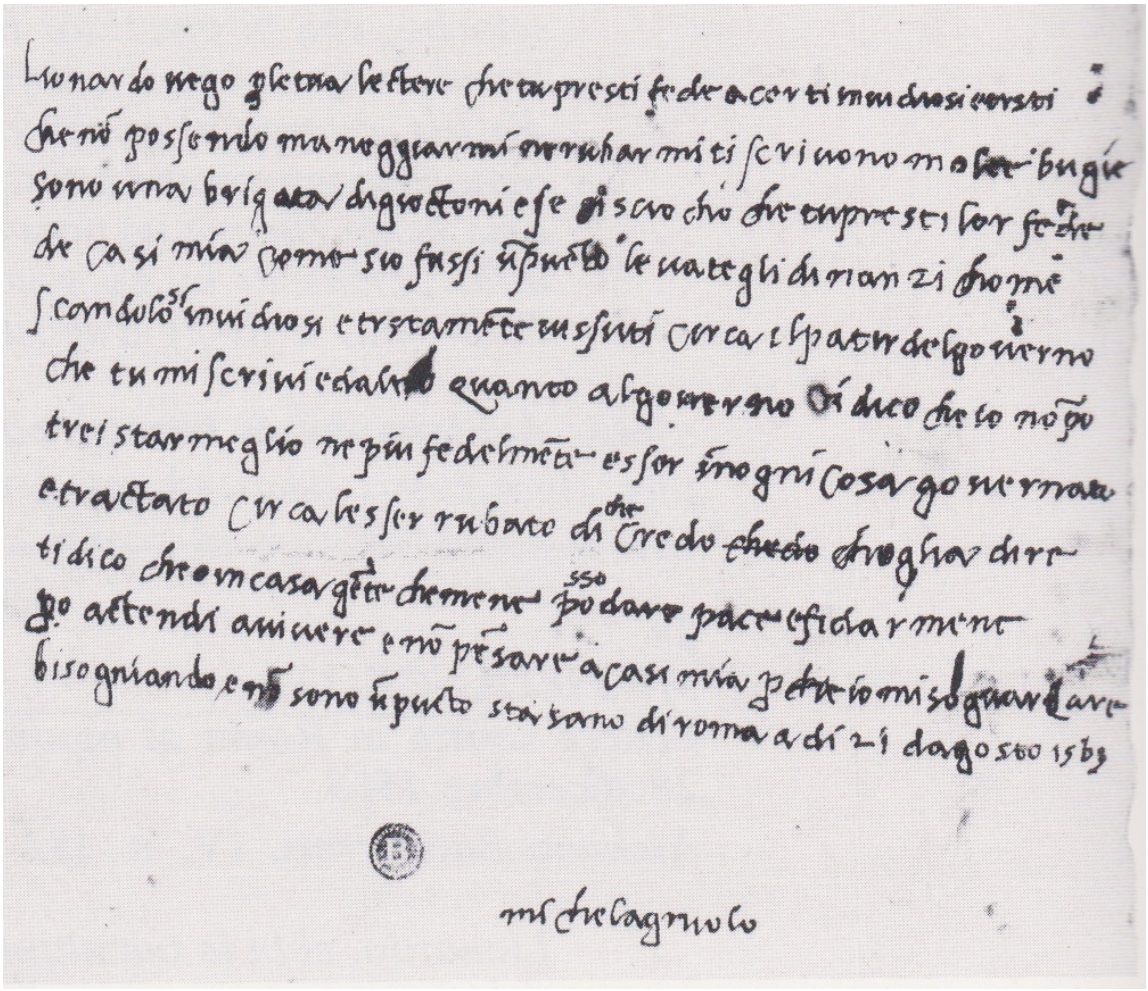
Figure A12. Michelangelo Buonarroti, letter written in Rome to nephew Lionardo in Florence, 21 August 1563. Archivio Buonarroti, IV, n. 181. Image Credit: Lucillia Bardeschi Ciulich, *Costanza ed evoluzione nella scrittura di Michelangelo,* 78.



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